

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1682—VOL. LXV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 27, 1895.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



WHAT HAPPENED NEXT FRANK NEVER KNEW, ONLY THAT . . . HE NOW STOOD ALONE.

THE IMPULSE OF A MOMENT.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

ONE of the prettiest and, yet thus far, least known of the pleasure resorts on the Devonshire coast is the village of Watchet.

Many of the ancient houses, primitive as to aspect, and dating back to a bygone century, but comfortable withal, are still to be seen, dotted here and there at the foot of the hills, and inhabited for the most part by the lineal descendants of the original inmates.

But here and there on the sides of the hills, in sheltered nooks, and protected both by natural and artificial means from the full violence of the Channel's roughness, several modern dwellings have been erected by speculative builders for the accommodation of chance visitors.

During this particular season the little village has been unusually crowded, and even now, though the glory and brightness of summer have given

place to the more sombre hues of autumn, several families linger, unwilling to desert the still charming spot.

In the villa farthest removed from the coast, and named, for no particular reason, Glenholme, three persons were seated on the night our story opens.

Dinner was just over, and they had adjourned to the drawing-room.

The evening was not yet far enough advanced to ring for lights; but the cheerful fire threw out a ruddy glow.

The little group was composed of two ladies and a gentleman.

Of the former one, dressed in widow's weeds, appeared to be somewhere between forty and fifty years of age.

She was a slightly-made woman, with a grave, sweet face, patient grey eyes, apparently not unacquainted with grief, and black hair interspersed with streaks of white.

Stella Vyner, the elder lady's niece, was a girl, little, if anything, over twenty. She was tall, olive-complexioned, with an abundance of dark hair and great flashing black eyes.

Her movements were supple and full of grace;

but the poise of her head denoted a haughty imperious temperament, and an acute observer could detect from time to time evidences of a somewhat passionate nature.

Stella was in fact only half-English, her father, when a young man, having brought his wife home from sunny Spain.

The Spanish lady did not long survive her daughter's birth, and when a few years later Mr. Vyner died, the girl found a loving and tender-hearted guardian in the person of her aunt, Mrs. Mackindor.

The last member of the trio was that lady's son Frank. He was some two years his cousin's senior, and in his way quite as handsome.

Physically there were few points of resemblance between the young man and his mother. He was tall and fair like his dead father, with blue eyes, and hair of a light brown colour.

His features were almost faultlessly regular; but when at rest his face had a somewhat cold expression, which detracted from the otherwise prepossessing appearance.

At those times, however, when he waited upon his mother, all traces of sternness vanished; the blue eyes filled with a gleam of tender solicitude,

a loving smile almost womanish in its gentleness, wreathed his lips, and the tones of his voice were soft and sweet.

Very proud was Mrs. Mackinder of her handsome son, and he in turn was devoted to the delicate, rather timid little woman who leaned upon him in such trusting confidence.

Many a whispered "Thank Heaven for my boy!" had gone up from that mother's heart, when her soul had been bowed down in the bitterness of grief, for she never turned to her son for comfort in vain.

This evening he stood drumming softly, yet impatiently, on the window-pane, while Stella seated herself at the piano.

"Will you come and try over this duet with me!" she asked, with a swift glance in his direction.

"Thanks! no; you must excuse me to-night," he answered, "I am not equal to it."

"Is not your head better, Frank?" asked his mother, anxiously.

He smiled at her brightly.

"It is nothing really serious," he said; "perhaps, as Stella suggested this morning, it is nothing more than a lazy fit. By to-morrow, doubtless, I shall have recovered."

He turned again to the window, while Stella's fingers strayed mechanically over the keys, until at length, striking a familiar chord, she began to play in a dreamy manner a weird and mournful tune.

Presently the young man appeared to form a sudden resolution.

Crossing to his mother's side he kissed her tenderly.

"Do not wait for me," he said, "I shall have a long walk. The breeze from the Channel will freshen me. Sorry to act in such ungallant fashion, Stella; but my head really does ache badly."

"Will it be safe along those cliffs, Frank?" his mother asked; "remember the light is waning fast, and there is no moon."

He kissed her again.

"Ever fanciful," he said, fondly, "ever conjuring up imaginary dangers against which to warn me. But set your mind at rest. I know the cliffs well, and shall come to no harm. Besides, it will not be dark yet for hours."

"Still you will take care," she urged, earnestly; and he promised with a smile.

Stella followed him into the hall.

"You had better wear your covert coat," she advised. "You will find the air keen," and she reached it down from a peg.

"My mother's society is demoralising you, coo," he laughed lightly. "Fancy your taking to calculate the chances of a possible cold. But it's very kind of you none the less. Now, do not stay up for me; I have a key!"

"Good-night!" she said, "and take care of yourself."

The lamp in the hall was unlit, or the young man might have seen his cousin's face, and read there a secret of which he had not the faintest suspicion.

"Good-night!" he replied, carelessly, and opening the door stepped out into the night.

Like the majority of men who are unused to sickness, Frank felt very impatient at his attack of headache; but as he prophesied, the fresh breeze from the Channel did him good, and he walked along bravely.

Down in the village the lights twinkled at irregular intervals, and here and there across the waste of waters came the gleam from a ship's lantern shining fitfully.

Presently the narrow path along which the young man travelled forked, and for a moment he stood doubtful which direction he should take.

Had he known, could he but have guessed how much depended upon his decision, he would not have trifled with the matter so lightly, but to him, as to all of us, the future was hidden, and diverging to the right he went forward, to meet, unconsciously, the crisis of his life.

Many a time in the days to come he asked himself if it could really have been chance which directed his steps on that momentous night, or

whether, instead, he had not been a blind instrument in the hands of a purposeful fate!

The path which he had selected, leaving the shore, turned inland, and after a circuitous route would bring him, he knew by experience, to the high-road along which he could retrace his steps to Watchett.

Though not nearly so dangerous as the one he had discarded, it was still in places far from safe, and at one or two points especially a false step might hurl him over the sides of the cliffs to instant death.

The night however was not yet come; he knew the road well, and felt not an atom of fear. By this time his headache had nearly vanished; the brisk exercise cheered him, and he hummed merry snatches of a favourite air.

Presently glancing ahead he perceived a man advancing from the opposite direction, and walking, he fancied, somewhat unsteadily.

"Some fisherman," he muttered, "returning from Avondale, and not too sober, if I judge aright. For a man in that condition I should have reckoned the main road to be the safest route. Luckily however that narrow spur is the last of the dangerous spots."

The stranger was now in fact approaching a narrow ridge known locally as "Mahomet's Bridge," a place that had at different times been fruitful of many accidents.

Frank Mackinder quickened his pace, for once or twice the man lurched perilously near the edge of the cliffs.

As the interval between the two lessened Frank became conscious that his first conjecture was a wrong one; the stranger was no fisherman.

He was a tall, slightly-built man, presumably a tourist who had lost his way.

His eyes were down bent, but when at the sound of footsteps he raised his head Frank, who had already traversed a third of the ridge, drew back with a cry of dismay.

"Duke Favert!" he muttered, "of all men—and here!"

The other laughed—a harsh, sneering laugh, and his eyes flashed angrily.

His face still retained traces of its original good looks; but the eyes were puffy and swollen, the cheeks hollow, and seamed with lines indicative of coarse and sensual dissipation.

"Good-evening, Mr. Methodist!" he exclaimed, mockingly. "I trust my presence will not disturb your serious contemplation."

Disregarding the stupid jeer, Frank answered with enforced calmness,—

"If you follow my advice, Mr. Favert, you will put yourself in a place of safety before proceeding with your edifying conversation."

"Do you insinuate I am drunk!" the other asked, savagely.

The young man smiled still good-humouredly.

"My remark implies nothing," he answered, "save that this path is not a carriage-road, which you can see for yourself."

Duke Favert turned toward the edge of the cliff, and the expression on his face was not pleasant to behold; but Frank unfortunately failed to perceive it.

Alarmed, however, by his companion's movement he advanced a step, exclaiming,—

"For Heaven's sake man, stand back. Do you not know that you are trifling with death? If you miss your footing you will be dashed into a thousand pieces."

Duke smiled maliciously.

"Such solicitude is touching," he said, "it overwhelms me."

Then his humour changed. Clutching Frank by the shoulder, he asked, fiercely,—

"Do you remember what happened when last we met? Shall I refresh your memory? You struck me with a whip, curse you. Do you hear? You horse-whipped me, Duke Favert."

The man's face was livid now, and his eyes blazed with passion.

Frank disengaged his arm and edged away.

"You are excited," he said, "and excitement just here is not pleasant."

By this time, however, Duke Favert was incapable of realising the danger of his position and

struck out wildly at the man who had once subjected him to a bitter humiliation.

What happened then Frank never knew, only that whereas a moment before he was face to face with an angry man he now stood alone.

Following his first impulse he stretched himself at length on the earth, and leaning far out at the peril of his life over the edge of the cliff peered anxiously into space, and strained his ears for the sound of a human voice in agony.

Long he lay thus, waiting, waiting for that which reason assured him could never come.

Alas! he knew too well the spectacle hidden now in the gloom, but which the grey dawn of morning would reveal.

Dead, hundreds of feet below him, cold and pulseless and still, lay the body of the man whose heart so recently was filled with a blind, unreasoning hatred.

Rising slowly to his feet he raised his hat reverently, and said,—

"Thank Heaven, my hands are guiltless of his blood."

The idea in his mind when he started on the homeward journey was to acquaint the local police with the catastrophe, and organise a search party.

But before he reached the village his mind began to be assailed by a haunting dread lest the truth of his story should be doubted.

Had the dead man been a stranger his course would have been simple enough.

But unfortunately Duke Favert was not a stranger, and the knowledge of the bitter feud which had existed between the luckless man and himself was shared by more than one of their common acquaintances.

Why should he cast suspicion upon this fair fame when it would be so easy to conceal all knowledge of the tragedy?

His silence could harm no one, could work no ill either to the dead or the living.

Then he thought of his mother and the anguish the publication of his story would occasion her.

Knowing his innocence he had no fear of the law, nor of the verdict of his friends; but the world, he knew, was sometimes harsh in its judgment, and the slightest breath of suspicion would suffice to cloud his mother's happiness.

For her sake he would keep silence, and abandoning the intention of informing the police, he turned swiftly toward Glenholme.

Even at the moment of making it he realised the decision was a weak one, and foresaw dimly that he was storing up trouble for the future; but he had not strength to fight against it.

At Glenholme a light still burned in the drawing-room, and as he passed through the hall the door was thrown open and Stella stood before him.

"Well, Frank!" she began, "has the walk—and then, as the light fell across his features she added, hastily, "good Heavens! Frank, what has happened! You look ghastly."

"My head is worse," he said, attempting to smile, "the wind was too rough. But go to bed, coo, the night is late, you will be robbed of your beauty sleep."

He lit a candle and handed it to her.

"Good night," she said, slowly, "if you are no better in the morning I shall send for a doctor."

"Now what can be the meaning of this!" the girl asked herself as she went to her room, "for that something strange has occurred is beyond a doubt."

The next day Frank did not put in an appearance until shortly before dinner time, and then he found his cousin alone in the drawing-room.

She was obviously flushed and excited, but she endeavoured to address the young man in a tone of calmness.

"There is stirring news abroad," she said; "a terrible accident occurred last night. A stranger to the district fell over 'Mahomet's Bridge.'"

"Ah!" he said, not daring to look at her; "he was killed, of course?"

"Oh, yes; he would be dead before the bottom was reached. But the queer part of it is that the hapless man was an acquaintance of yours in the old days. From the card case in his pocket they have learned his name. He is Duke Favert,

the man you once quarrelled with so dreadfully. How lucky you did not meet him last night."

"Yes!" and he paused.

Why he should have put the question he did not know, but he could not resist asking.

"Is there any suspicion of foul play?"

"Oh! no!" Stella answered cheerfully. "The fall was the result of a pure accident. You know what evil repute Mahomet's Bridge bears. But Jenkins, the local Inspector, told me there were no marks of a struggle having taken place. One of the men picked up on the cliff an ordinary coat button, which did not belong to the dead man, but that might have been lying there for months."

Frank shifted his gaze uneasily; he was wondering if there was a button missing from his covert coat.

Stella followed his gaze with a feeling of amusement. The same idea had flashed into her mind, and she had already verified the correctness of her suspicions.

Choosing a moment when the hall was deserted she had taken the garment from the peg and found, as she more than half expected, that the middle button had been torn off.

Stella Vyner was one of those persons quick to resolve and quicker still in action.

Passing to her room she hunted over the assortment of odds and ends which most ladies delight in storing up, and to her joy discovered a capital substitute for the article in the hands of the local constabulary.

A few moments later Frank's coat was hanging in its accustomed place, and when after dinner the young man furtively passed his hand from top to bottom, he uttered a sigh of relief at finding nothing was missing.

An inquest was held, of course; but it was merely a formal affair, and the verdict from the first was a foregone conclusion.

After the identification of the body by a friend of the deceased man, two or three witnesses deposed to having met the victim of the tragedy on the night of his death, and they all unanimously agreed that he was in a totally unfit state to take the path across the cliffs.

This in itself was conclusive evidence to the minds of the Watchett people, and in addition were two other facts which pointed plainly in the same direction.

In the first place the ground nowhere showed signs of a struggle such as might reasonably be expected if the man had fought for his life, and his money and valuables remained intact.

Without leaving their places the jury unhesitatingly returned a verdict of Accidental Death, and their finding was cordially endorsed by the coroner, the assembled spectators, and the world at large.

Only Stella Vyner, remembering Frank's haggard features and the incident of the missing button, smiled softly to herself at the world's credulity.

Naturally the inmates of Glenholme did not attend the inquest, but when the result was known the girl sought her cousin.

"The jury have recorded their verdict," she said, "and, as I foretold, it was a clear case of accident. The poor fellow it appears was not sober."

"It is a sad ending to a life which at one time offered promise of unusual brilliancy," he answered. "Poor Duke! we had become bitter enemies, but I cannot forget we were friends once."

To which Stella looking him steadily in the face replied,—

"Were I you, Frank, I should endeavour to banish him altogether from my mind."

Then Mrs. Mackinder entered the room, and as if by mutual consent the young people started a fresh subject.

Luckily for Frank's peace of mind the days of their sojourn at Watchett were drawing to a close. Before the end of another week they were to return to town, where the young man fondly hoped he would be able to forget the events of that fatal night.

"After all," he reflected, "I acted wisely. The verdict of the jury was just. Duke's death was a pure accident, and I was in no way to

blame. But had I told my story, and admitted the feud which existed between us, who can say what judgment the world would have pronounced?"

CHAPTER II.

It was the spring of the year following Duke Favert's death. Mrs. Mackinder, more fragile and delicate looking than ever, was seated in her pretty London drawing-room.

The curtains were drawn, the gas lit, and the bright fire in the grate threw out a grateful warmth.

Presently the lady was aroused from the dreamy reverie into which she had fallen by the sound of approaching footsteps, and as the door was softly opened her face beamed with a smile of surpassing tenderness.

"Well! mother mine, dreaming as usual," exclaimed a musical voice; "that is a bad habit, and one to be avoided," and crossing the room lightly, the young man stooped down to kiss the upturned face.

"Are you busy, dear?" his mother asked; "if not I wish to speak to you for a few minutes."

"Only a club appointment with Wyndham Hall," he returned, "but that gentleman must learn to cultivate the gentle art of patience. *Place and d'ame!*" and drawing a chair forward he sat down, facing her.

"Now that is extremely curious, Frank!" his mother remarked, "as indirectly, Mr. Hall is connected with what I have to say."

Frank nodded.

"I understand," he said, "you are thinking of Stella. He is genuinely fond of her, and I hope she will accept him; the match would be an admirable one in every respect."

Mrs. Mackinder sighed audibly. She was exceedingly proud of her son, but just then she could not honestly rank his intellect very high.

"Has he spoken to her?" she asked.

"No! but he is only waiting a good opportunity. We must provide one for him."

"He will appeal in vain," Mrs. Mackinder said. "Stella will refuse him."

"But why? There is nothing against him. He bears a good reputation. He is young, rich, handsome, and talented; what more can she require!"

"My boy, if he were a prince it would make no difference. Stella does not love him, and I do not think she ever will."

The young man shook his head, with a gesture of dissent.

"She will learn to love him in time," he said, "and meanwhile he can well afford to wait; my pretty coz is a prize worth serving a long apprenticeship for."

His mother gazed at him earnestly.

"Has it never struck you," she asked, "that Stella's heart has long since passed out of her keeping? It is rather a delicate subject to discuss, but before you I can speak freely. For many years Stella has been as my own child, and I have learned to understand her thoroughly. From the eyes of the world the child has hidden her secret bravely, but she cannot deceive me, and I must admit your zeal in Mr. Hall's cause does not please me. I had hoped for something so different."

Frank looked completely mystified; his mother's words were an enigma which he could not solve.

"Upon my word," he said at length, "I am quite at sea; I must ask you to explain your meaning more clearly."

Mrs. Mackinder hesitated. As she had said, the subject was a delicate one, but believing no harm could be done by revealing the truth, she resolved to speak out.

"Stella will never marry Wyndham Hall," she repeated, "because she has already learned to love another. Must I say more?"

A sudden light dawned upon the young man's mind, and his face flushed.

"Mother!" he said tremblingly, "I never dreamed of that; to me Stella has always appeared as a sister."

Mrs. Mackinder smiled gently.

"It is the knowledge of that which has caused me to speak," she answered. "Frank! is it impossible for you to regard Stella in any other light? You know well I would not wish to force your inclinations, but Stella's happiness is very dear to me, my boy."

"I cannot, mother!" he exclaimed in agitated tones; "I am grieved to disappoint you; in a certain sense I am very fond of Stella, but I can never ask her to marry me."

Mrs. Mackinder did not continue the discussion. Looking at the young man's flushed face she learned another secret, which had hitherto escaped her.

"Who is she?" she asked simply, and Frank, who was blushing furiously like a school-girl, made answer,—

"You do not know her as yet; her name is Maisie Daynham. Nothing is settled; indeed I have not spoken, but if I cannot make her my wife I shall never marry. And now I must keep my appointment before it is too late. Good night, mother, I am sorry your dreams have been so rudely shattered."

Kissing her cheek he went out, and Mrs. Mackinder, leaning back in the easy-chair, murmured,—

"Poor Stella!"

At the time of this conversation Stella Vyner had gone on a visit to the house of a friend, and was not expected to return until the end of the following week.

At breakfast the next morning Frank said tentatively,—

"Mother, have you remembered that Mrs. Maitland's ball is fixed for to-night? Do you feel capable of going? I believe we shall meet Miss Daynham there, and I should like you to form her acquaintance."

Mrs. Mackinder rarely left the house, save for a quiet drive; but she could refuse little to her son, and, perceiving how thoroughly in earnest he was, she consented to accompany him.

"I am certain you will like her," the young man said on the way to Mrs. Maitland's residence; "her disposition is so amiable."

"And of course her loveliness exceeds that of any other girl who will be present?"

"I know you are quizzing me, but that is the truth nevertheless," he replied with enthusiasm; "Miss Daynham is without a rival."

Mrs. Mackinder smiled at this lover-like expression.

"I begin to understand," she said, laughingly. "I am not called upon to pronounce judgment, but merely to confirm the one already passed. Well, I will endeavour to acquit myself to your satisfaction."

Many of the guests had already assembled, but Frank found a snug corner free from all possible draught, and commanding a good view of the ball-room, and here he comfortably ensconced his mother.

"Are you not going to dance?" she asked; "your laziness will provoke Mrs. Maitland's righteous indignation. It is a shame to waste your time here, while so many nice girls are without partners."

"I am reserving my energies," he said; "there will be ample time to atone for any deficiencies. Ah! there she is! Look! Now, confess that my praise was not exaggerated."

Following the direction of his glance Mrs. Mackinder saw a young girl of surpassing loveliness. Her figure was slight, but of admirable proportions, and every movement was instinct with a native gracefulness.

Her dress, which suited her marvellously, was composed of some soft white clinging material, and against her bosom nestled a rich blush rose, whilst a similar flower was placed in her luxuriant tresses.

Of other ornaments she possessed none; but Mrs. Mackinder, examining her critically, acknowledged that the girl's simplicity of attire showed exquisite judgment.

Her features were faultlessly regular; her complexion a delicate commingling of cream and roses.

The violet eyes, large and full, were fringed with heavy silken lashes; the mouth was small and of perfect shape, and the parting of the

rose-red lips displayed when she smiled even pearly teeth.

The fair white forehead was broad and smooth, and brushed back from it in artistic negligence was a wealth of soft brown hair shot with gold.

"Yes!" murmured Mrs. Mackinder reluctantly, under her breath; "she is indeed beautiful. Here is a beauty of which poets rave and painters dream, a beauty before which men fall bound as in chains."

"But, mother," urged the young man, "Miss Daynham is not only beautiful but good. Her face is expressive of purity and innocence."

"Bring her to me presently," his mother answered, "and now I will not keep you longer."

Frank moved away joyously to where Miss Daynham stood, surrounded by a little knot of courtiers.

She smiled at him graciously.

"Am I in time for our dance?" she asked; "we are a trifle late; my aunt was detained at the last moment."

"It is just beginning," he answered, and, leaning lightly upon his arm, she took her place in the dance.

As they walked down the room many murmurs of admiration were elicited by the girl's beauty, and Frank's face was radiant with happiness.

"All this has the charm of novelty to me," Miss Daynham remarked; "we have lived so long in Italy that I quite enjoy the sensation of forming an item in an English crowd."

"The crowd fully appreciates its good fortune," he returned, meaningly, "your presence is causing quite a sensation."

"Ah! now you are descending to complimentary phrases, which I do not like. Besides, the exertion prevents you from keeping step," and she smiled genially.

"Now," she remarked, with a gesture of comical despair when the music ceased, "I would ask you to lead me to my aunt, but she has disappeared."

"Will you permit me to take you to my mother?" he asked; "you can stay with her while I go in search of Mrs. Maddock."

"I shall be delighted," she affirmed, while a shy, pretty blush overspread her features, and Frank piloted her safely across the room.

"Mother, this is Miss Daynham," he said; "she has come to sit with you while I look for her aunt."

"My aunt is but an indifferent *chaperon*," the girl said, "but I cannot grumble since Mr. Mackinder has procured me such a charming substitute."

"Shall I inform Mrs. Maddock that you are safe under my mother's wing?" Frank asked.

"If Mrs. Mackinder will be bothered with me," the girl said, and Frank departed on his mission, well pleased at the turn which events had taken.

Though sorry for Stella's sake, Frank's mother was too true-hearted a woman not to do Maisie Daynham full justice, and she acknowledged with a sigh that the girl had a thousand charms besides her wondrous physical beauty.

When the young man returned, having executed his errand, he found the two chatting pleasantly like old friends, and the look on his mother's face reassured him.

"Miss Daynham has been informing me that a great portion of her life has been spent in Italy," she said, "and that she will probably soon return to that delightful country."

"And make her own land the poorer by her absence! Really, Miss Daynham, you should have more consideration for your own countrymen."

The girl blushed prettily.

"You are rich in compliments this evening. Does a ball-room always inspire you thus?"

"No!" he answered; "the place has little to do with it," and then paused, while the language of the eyes completed the sentence.

Just then they were joined by Captain Stanton, a handsome dashing-looking soldier, well-known to Frank and his mother, with whom he exchanged a few polite words. Then turning to Maisie, he said,—

"Miss Daynham, I believe I have the privilege of claiming your hand for this dance?"

The girl took his arm with a smile, promising to see Mrs. Mackinder again before the night was over.

"Well, mother!" questioned the young man, eagerly, when they two were once more alone, "is she not beautiful?"

"Yes, my boy, and what is of far greater importance, I believe her to be a thoroughly good and amiable girl. I do not wonder that you should have learned to love her."

Frank's intended reply was interrupted by the approach of two of his mother's old friends, who had just discovered her retreat, and throughout the remainder of the evening no further opportunity offered of renewing the conversation.

That evening was a very happy one, and the memory of it was long treasured up in Frank's mind.

He was far from vain; indeed his blindness to Stella's partiality clearly demonstrated that fact, but he could not help feeling that Maisie displayed a greater interest in him than she did in the others of her partners.

"I will win her," he said to himself that night, as he sat in his room. "I must win her; my love is too great to be beaten," and when at length he closed his eyes in sleep that was the one thought which still filled his brain.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Frank Mackinder told his mother that his love for Stella had never been of any other nature than that which a brother might feel for a favourite sister he spoke nothing but the truth.

The two had lived so much together, their intercourse had been so open and unconventional, that the knowledge of the girl's unreciprocated affection came upon him with a shock of surprise.

Had he never met Maisie Daynham it is possible that a sentiment of profound pity might have induced him, however reluctantly, to fall in with his mother's suggestion.

Even as it was the contemplation of his cousin's distress filled his heart with sorrow. It was like a vague shadowy thread running through the bright band of his golden-tinted hopes.

Was he himself in fault? That was the question which during the next few days rose a hundred times unbidden to his lips.

He went back patiently over the details of their lives, reviewing each incident, calling back to memory his words, his looks, the very gestures he had used.

"No!" he concluded, finally; "in no one instance does my conscience accuse me; at least I can assert that with perfect truth."

Then for a moment he wondered if his mother could have been mistaken, but discarded that idea after a brief reflection. Mrs. Mackinder was far too shrewd a woman to have spoken thus without being absolutely certain of her ground.

"If only she would marry Wyndham now," the young man thought with a sigh of regret, "everything would be smooth sailing."

Despite this under current of sadness however life passed very pleasantly with Frank Mackinder at this time.

Not a day came without his contriving to spend a portion of it in Maisie's society, and the end of each interview left him more hopelessly in love than before.

The season that year was an unusually brilliant one, and as they both moved amongst the same set it was not difficult for them to see a great deal of each other.

"Is it true," he asked one evening as they were sitting out a dance, "that you return to the Continent at the expiration of the season?"

"Yes," she answered with half-averted face; "my father is never really happy in England; he only stays on now for my pleasure."

"And when do you come to town again?"

"Ah, that is impossible to foretell; everything depends upon my father. By the way, we shall see you at my aunt's dance, of course!"

"Do you imagine I would miss an opportunity of seeing you?" he asked, and his cheeks flushed.

Just for a second her eyes met his, and then swiftly she bent her head.

Frank's heart beat fast; his colour came and went; a torrent of burning words rose to his lips and yet he did not speak.

His love was so intense, so fervid and overwhelming that he feared to give it utterance.

Love, which at times is so headstrong and impulsive, at others is timorous, confused and self-depreciatory.

Did she care for him? Was he really anything more to her than a pleasant partner, in whose society she took a passing interest?

In his heart he believed she loved him, but the immense stake for which he was playing made him hesitating and cautious.

For him he knew there could be nothing in the world so precious as the love of this beautiful girl.

He loved her, and the thought sent the hot blood surging madly through his veins and dyed his cheeks crimson, and made his eyes gleam with a joyous light.

If she would be his wife! If only she would give him the right to call her his.

But the very magnitude of his anticipated happiness held him spell-bound. His heart was assailed by doubts and fears. Was he not a dreamer of dreams? he asked himself, conjuring up vain imaginings!

Why should this lovely girl, at whose feet half the men in society were suing humbly, confer so precious a boon upon him?

What talisman did he possess with which to gain her love? He was young, fairly good-looking and moderately rich, nothing more. He could not endow her with the lustre of a great name; he had at his command neither noble rank nor a colossal fortune.

And all these he knew she could choose at her will. Men of rank and wealth, and genius were in the field against him, and his sole weapon, both for attack and defence, was Love.

What as yet he did not adequately realise was the marvellous power wielded by the small blind god—the utter impotence of all against one tiny shafted from Cupid's bow.

We may laugh and deride—clothing ourselves in the tawdry tinsel of our specious nineteenth century philosophy we may affect to despise; we may endeavour to bury it, beneath a heap of ridicule, contumely and cheap sarcasm, but in spite of all it is love that rules the world and enriches our lives by its inherent nobility.

But to Frank, seated there in that brilliant assembly, surrounded by every conceivable form of luxury, with evidences of unlimited wealth patent on every side, brushed against in passing by men famous in every rank of life, it seemed a presumption little short of folly that he should aspire to the hand of one who, did she choose, could select from the noblest of them all.

And should his fancy have led him wrong he dreaded to confront the blank dreary waste of years into which his life must henceforth resolve itself.

For this love which thrilled his nerves, which quickened his pulses and fired his blood, was no idle passing whim, but the strong passion of a strong man's heart.

Baffled or triumphant—a source of misery or a never-ending spring of happiness, this love would abide with him for ever, a part of his very being.

And now at the critical moment a great wave of fear overwhelmed him and drove back the words from his lips.

Even while he yet hesitated, like a timid swimmer standing by the margin of some turbulent stream, the opportunity was lost.

Gallant men and beautiful women were taking their places for the next dance, and with a parting smile Maisie was hurried away.

The young man stood looking on helplessly, with a dazed expression.

Now that he was once more alone he recognised clearly how foolishly he had acted.

They had sat out the last of their dances, and

now he would be unable to gain any further speech with her in private.

Presently his brow cleared.

"I shall see her to-morrow," he muttered, "and I will not play the coward's rôle twice." "I have been seeking you all the evening," exclaimed a familiar voice at his elbow, and turning round the young man beheld his friend Wyndham Hall.

"Are you here alone?" continued the latter.

"Yes! my mother's health cannot stand this incessant round of pleasure, and Stella has not yet returned. By the way are the Margetsons not old friends of yours?"

"The Whitmore Margetsons?"

"Yes; my cousin is staying with them. Alice, the second girl, has been ill, she is convalescent now; but not sufficiently strong to stand the racket of a London season, so Stella volunteered to keep her company at Whitmore for a short time. She does not return for several days."

Wyndham Hall stroked his chin reflectively.

"It ought to afford a capital opportunity," he mused; "do you think, under the circumstances, I could venture to present myself there?"

"Why not? Alice is no longer confined to her room. Of course they are very quiet; but I should say the family would regard your visit in the light of a blessing."

"Hang the family!" returned the young man impatiently. "I am thinking of Stella alone, Frank," and there was a new ring of earnestness in the speaker's voice, "do you honestly believe I have the ghost of a chance?"

Poised by this downright question Frank hesitated to reply.

"It is always so difficult to foretell how a love affair will end," he said, at length, "that I think it would be advisable to reserve my prophecy. One thing, however, is at least certain. My cousin is well worth serving an apprenticeship for."

"She is!" enthusiastically. "I could wait twenty years if I had a single ray of hope. And so you advise my running down to Whitmore?"

Again Frank betrayed a curious hesitancy as he considered his answer.

With the knowledge of Stella's partiality for himself could he conscientiously encourage his friend to pursue what appeared a hopeless course?

If Wyndham could but gain Stella's love it would make for the happiness of them all, and such a consummation was assuredly within the region of possibility.

"Ah!" exclaimed Wyndham, interrupting the chain of his thoughts. "I see you are doubtful as to the nature of my reception. But as sooner or later I intend to ask her I may as well learn my fate speedily."

"Well, my best wishes for your success go with you," Frank said; "it would afford me intense pleasure to learn Stella had accepted you."

The other's brow cleared a little.

"Thanks old man," he said, gratefully. "I shall go now with a better heart. Do not be offended; but I thought perhaps you—"

Frank understood what he would have said, and anticipated him.

"No!" he interrupted, pleasantly, "you were mistaken, in proof whereof I will tell you a secret. I am going to put a similar question to Miss Daynam."

"Then here's to our joint success," cried Wyndham, grasping his companion's hand, "and now I'll go; to-morrow will find me at Whitmore."

Frank heaved a sigh of regret as he watched the retreating figure.

"A lover to be proud of," he murmured, "yet, somehow, I fear that his gallant bearing will avail him little."

Presently he himself moved toward the door, for the guests were beginning to disperse, and he was eager to catch a farewell glance, mayhap a friendly smile from Maisie's bright eyes.

Naturally he expected nothing more, but fortune befriended him, and he was enabled to exchange a few words with the girl whom he loved so fondly.

"You will not fail to put in an appearance at

our ball!" she said, archly, and with a warm pressure of her hand, he murmured,—

"You may be sure that I shall count the moments until the time arrives."

That was all, but his heart thrilled with a strange exultation as she passed on, for he believed he had seen that in her eyes which augured favourably for the success of his suit.

The next morning he woke up with the same sensation of satisfied desire, and throwing up his window, glanced out upon the glory of the risen day.

The sky was blue, the streets were bathed in golden dancing sunshine, a smiling happiness seemed to have clasped all the world in its embrace, and he accepted it as an omen of his coming success.

"Maisie will be my wife," he muttered with a joyous smile; "I can fear no longer; my heart tells me she is mine, mine for ever."

There lay no shadow across his path; love and happiness joined hand in hand to welcome him in the glorious sunlight, and in the anticipation of the joy that would be his he did not remember how speedily the sun's radiance can be blotted out by the black swift gathering clouds.

With the quick intuition of a mother's love Mrs. Mackinder noted the exuberance of his spirit and rallied him upon the cause.

"No!" he said, gaily, in answer to her question; "the time is not as yet ripe for your congratulations; but I do not fear what Maisie's answer will be."

In his excitement he had forgotten all about Stella, and wondered why across his mother's gentle features there should have flitted a momentary shadow of grief.

CHAPTER IV.

It was the evening of Mrs. Maddock's ball, and Frank, after finishing dressing, had looked into his mother's room to bid her good-night.

"Wish me good luck, mother," he said; "I am going to put my fate to the test."

"Good luck, my boy," she responded with genuine heartiness, for however much she grieved for Stella her son's happiness after all touched her most closely. "If you succeed, you will gain, I am sure, a very charming wife."

He smiled happily.

"I do not think I shall fail," he said; "Heaven help me if I do!" and his mother, catching sight of the expression on his face, silently echoed his prayer.

Frank thought he had never seen Maisie looking so lovely as she did that night.

The violet eyes shone with unusual brilliancy; the delicate rose tint on her cheeks was richer and deeper; her whole face glowed with a joyous happiness.

She blushed crimson when she welcomed him, whispering shyly,—

"I am glad you have come; but I fear I shall see little of you for the next hour or two."

"You have saved me a dance," he said, in the same low tone, "have you not?"

She gave him her card.

"You see I am not exactly my own mistress this evening," she observed, apologetically; "but I have succeeded in keeping a vacant space or two a long way down."

"Thank you," he murmured; "it was exceedingly kind of you to remember me at all; but I must not keep you longer from your guests."

It was not until the night was well advanced that Frank's opportunity arrived; but he was content to wait.

The irresolution which recently characterised him had vanished; he indulged in no more useless fits of self-depreciation; in some unexplained manner his timorous fears had fled and been replaced by a calm assurance of success.

"This evening's exertions have wearied you," he said, softly, when at length she came to him; "we will find a quiet spot and you shall rest."

"But you will be deprived of your dance," she objected, "and I am not so very tired."

"You must regard me for the moment as your physician and follow my advice," he answered;

"and I recommend a brief rest. Besides, that course will suit me best too. I have something to say which could not very well be spoken in the dance."

It was marvellous how coolly and collectedly he uttered his words, and Maisie experienced a little feeling of amusement at the half-air of proprietorship he unconsciously assumed.

Nevertheless she did not appear to resent this new phase of demeanour, and allowed him to lead her into an adjoining room.

"Thank you," she said, as she sat down on a comfortable lounge; "I really do appreciate this rest. As the niece of the hostess I have had but little time for leisure. Still it seems a pity that you should be compelled to sacrifice your enjoyment!"

Maisie possessed abundance of common sense, and realised to the full Frank's object; but her feeble attempt to divert his purpose was entirely ineffectual.

The young man had already lost one opportunity; he had no intention of letting another slip by unused.

"You give me credit for a sacrifice which I have not made," he observed, with a smile. "Indeed, I fear you will consider shortly that I have inveigled you hitherto under false pretences."

"Yet you do not affect penitence for your fault!"

"No!" he exclaimed, energetically, and then paused.

"Do you remember the last occasion when we sat out a dance?" he resumed, in a low, earnest voice. "There was a question I wished to ask you then, and my heart failed me; but whatever the result may be I can wait no longer. Maisie, my darling, is it necessary to clothe my meaning in words? Have you not long ago read my secret? Maisie, I love you! May I dare to hope that you can learn to love me a little in return? I know that from the world's point of view I am not worthy of you; it was the knowledge of this which held me silent. But my love is too strong and true to be held in check any longer by such considerations. Maisie, I love you! will you be my wife? I have nothing to urge on my own behalf beyond my love; but to me that seems all-sufficient. Other men may offer princely gifts at your feet; they may bring you justly great and famous names; they may tell of noble rank, of beautiful estates, of fabulous revenues; but they cannot claim to bring you a greater, more honest love than mine. That is my one treasure, Maisie, a pure and loyal love; a heart that never throbbled with passion for any woman but yourself. Maisie, is it worth accepting? That is the question to ask which I have brought you here!"

"Love is blind," runs the old adage, but Frank's love enabled him to read correctly the secret of the young girl's heart.

All the time he was speaking Maisie sat, her glorious violet eyes shaded completely by their heavy, silken fringes, and for a moment or two after he finished speaking she kept her position.

But she could not keep back the rush of colour from her cheeks; she could not restrain the quickened rising of her bosom, nor conceal the tremulous agitation of her pretty red lips, and Frank bending over whispered earnestly,—

"Maisie, darling! lift your eyes to mine and tell me I was not mistaken; tell me that I have not sued in vain."

Very slowly the lovely face, made doubly beautiful by its shyness, was raised toward him, and Frank knowing all was well kissed her.

Outside, in the crowded ball-room the merry guests laughed and jested and danced, but these two, each clasping the hand of the other, sat heedless of all save their own great joy.

Maisie was the first to bring her thoughts back to every-day matters.

"Frank!" she whispered with a charming blush, "I do not wish to go, but people will think my absence odd and inquire for me. Besides, I must not altogether desert my aunt."

"Give me one kiss," he begged, "let me feel your lips pressed to mine, just once, that I may make sure my happiness is not a dream."

She lifted her blushing face and kissed him.

"Now I really must go," she said resolutely, and as they passed out together he whispered,—
"I shall see your father in the morning; I trust it will not be difficult to secure his consent to our union."

Frank led the young girl to her aunt, and then turned away, his heart filled with happiness.

When he returned to his own house Mrs. Mackinder had retired to her room, and, great as was the temptation, he would not disturb her.

In the morning he would tell her of this new joy which had come to him; but until then he must be his own confidant.

He drew up the blind to let in a flood of silvery light from the full moon, and undressed slowly.

His heart was full of Maisie. He repeated her name softly to himself; the sound afforded him a strange delight. Over and over again he whispered it, until the very walls appeared to catch the pleasing intonation, and cast it back in varying cadence.

And Maisie had promised to be his wife! Marvellous as the fact might appear, it was none the less true that this lovely girl had freely given herself to him!

Without extraneous aid he had won this precious prize! With only Love for his talisman he gained this priceless gift!

Little wonder that he lay long awake, dreaming bright dreams of a golden future; building fairy edifices; tinting his life with the warm rich hues of love and happiness.

Little wonder that at such a time there should rise up before him no memory of the dead and buried past; no remembrance of that Devonshire village with its rugged cliffs; no recollection of that fatal night, when Duke Favert went to his ghastly death.

Long time in truth had he sorrowed with futile and unavailing regret over that unfortunate accident, though he himself had been guiltless of wrong; but the passing months had brought him solace; and the grief which he at first felt had been weakened by the busy life of the living world.

Like other men he had turned his back upon the past. That incident was closed; the chapter ended, the book shut.

Alas! how is it that with all our learning, our philosophy, our hard and bitter experience, we find it so difficult to recognize the simple truth that the past never dies!

Does not the life of each one of us, however inexperienced, swarm with proofs? The idle word, the bitter jest, the mean action, even the dishonourable thought, driven back eternally, may be at its first appearance, can we ever safely affirm they are dead? Do they not, each and all of them, come back from their secret hiding-places, and confront us boldly in the light of day?

We may bury them deep beneath the weight of advancing years, we may heap them high with gratified ambition, with worldly success, with far reaching fame; nay, we may drown them in tears of sorrow and remorse.

And what avails it all? Nothing! The past will not be killed; it refuses to lose its vitality; cover it with the waters of Lethe and its seeming death is but a pretence.

Some day, alas for sorrowing humanity! it will raise its head unexpectedly, eager to poison the present and desolate the future.

But in the mind of the young man glorying in his triumphant love such a truth as this had at present no place.

Just now the register of his brain was limited; it recorded but one impression, the fact of Maisie's love.

And even while he lay thus, his face radiant with happiness, another scene far less pleasant was being enacted down at Whitmore.

In one of the pretty bedrooms of Whitmore Hall a tall handsome girl sat by the open window, full in the flood of the moonlight.

She had wrapped herself in her dressing-gown, and her luxuriant black hair hung loosely over her shoulders.

Her face was flushed, the red lips firmly

pressed together, and the black eyes flashed with an angry light.

Wyndham Hall had paid his promised visit to Whitmore; he had put his question, and this was the result.

In his innocence he had used Frank's name, had told how the latter was anxious for his success, had even revealed the secret that Frank himself was likely shortly to be married, concluding with the remark that if Stella would consent they might have a double wedding.

The tortured girl bore herself bravely throughout this trying interview. She did not dislike Wyndham Hall, and perhaps the sense of her own misery induced her to show him greater pity than might otherwise have been the case.

Indeed, her refusal of his offer was couched in such gentle and compassionate terms that the young man went away more than half-convinced that he would fare better at a second attempt.

But when night came, when she could lock the door of her room, and withdraw herself from the gaze of her fellows, the pent-up anguish of her wounded heart found free outlet.

A host of conflicting emotions warred in her breast. Love, anger, and a deep sense of outraged pride strove for the mastery, and each possessed her in turn.

In her ignorance the girl had misconstrued the delicate attentions, the little services, which Frank, looking upon her as a cherished sister, had loved to render.

She recalled to memory his fond smiles and glances of affection; her nerves thrilled as she seemed to feel again the touch of some tender caress, the remembrance of which had been with her for long months.

Innocent pleasantries, forgotten by him, she bore in mind, magnifying their importance, until to her excited imagination and highly-strung feelings it seemed as if Frank had in truth shamefully deceived her.

And as this view became more and more pronounced it effectually veiled all other ideas.

The tears which she had shed in the first flush of her bitterness were dried up; pity for her own misery slowly changed and hardened into anger; the passionate southern temperament, inherited from her mother, warped her judgment, and hurried her into a gross injustice.

In her blind rage she was powerless to reason; all sense of proportion had left her; she could see nothing clearly but the fact, as she deemed it, of Frank's treachery.

And as she sat there slowly formed in her mind a vision of a night long past. She too had buried that incident, but now it returned full of throbbing, palpitating life and vitality.

Without exactly knowing why she thought of Frank's haggard features, of Duke Favert's violent death, of that missing button which she had so deftly replaced.

She thought of it all in a dreamy, purposeless way, having no definite plan or object in view, but fascinated by it; and when at length, exhausted by excitement, she lay down, it still formed the sole subject of her thoughts.

It was not until her eyes were heavy with sleep that it occurred to her she had omitted to ask the name of the lady to whom Frank had transferred his affections—but there was time enough for that.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was little need for Mrs. Mackinder to question her son as to the result of his mission—the fact of his success was stamped too legibly upon his handsome features to admit of doubt.

"Congratulate me, mother!" he said, joyfully.

"Maisie has promised to be my wife."

"I do, Frank, with all my heart," his mother replied; "and I trust you may have many years of happiness before you. Did you meet Mr. Daynham last night?"

"No; he never puts in an appearance at these festive gatherings; but I shall probably see him during the course of the day. However, I do not suppose he will offer any objection."

"Unless on the score of his daughter's youth.

You must not lose sight of the fact that Miss Daynham is extremely young to be married."

"It is consoling to think the defect is on the right side," the young man answered; and Mrs. Mackinder laughingly agreed with his remark.

After breakfast Frank walked down to his club, half expecting to meet his friend Wyndham.

Nor was he disappointed, as he found that gentleman alone in the smoking-room.

The two shook hands cordially, and Frank exclaimed,—

"Well, have you been down to Whitmore?"

"Yes; came back by the last train yesterday."

"And how did your wooing prosper? Am I to congratulate you?"

Wyndham shook his head mournfully.

"She refused me," he answered with a sigh; "but her manner was so considerate that I do not despair in time of getting the verdict altered."

This remark afforded Frank a distinct feeling of relief.

After all, it was just possible that his mother had been mistaken, and that Stella might accept Wyndham's offer.

"I hope you found Dame Fortune more favourable," the young man said, after a pause, and Frank nodded affirmatively.

"Yes," he answered, "I have gained the lady's consent, and should her father make no objection I imagine that, for once, the course of true love will run smooth."

"Why not tackle him at once?" suggested the other; "he is in the reading-room, or at least he was a few moments ago."

"A good idea," Frank said; "I'll go while yet my courage is screwed to the sticking point; I may require it."

The ordeal, however, proved much less terrible than he had expected.

Mr. Daynham was on the point of leaving the premises, but he readily accompanied Frank to a private room, and courteously listened to his statement.

"Of course," he remarked, "you possess an independent income. I am not accustomed to over-value wealth, but it is a *sine qua non* that Maisie's husband must have an assured position."

On this and other points Frank was able to give satisfactory assurances, and then the elder man put forward his last objection.

"I am not partial to long engagements," he said, "and Maisie is too young to be married just yet. Now, I'll give you my views in a few words. I rather like you, and would have no hesitation in trusting Maisie to your care. But she must wait for at least twelve months, and during that time many things may happen. Therefore we will have no formal engagement, but if next year you are both in the same frame of mind I will give my consent. Oh, yes," he continued, as Frank attempted to interpose, "I know all about that. Of course you consider the terms very hard; you are young and enthusiastic, and can see no reason for delay, but in this matter I must be allowed to decide."

Frank did think the terms hard, and expressed the opinion forcibly, but in spite of protestations and appeals Mr. Daynham declined to be moved.

"Come and dine with us this evening," he said, good-naturedly, "we are returning to Italy in a few days, and you will not have many opportunities of meeting Maisie for awhile. Later on, of course, I shall offer no objection to your running over for a week or two; indeed, I shall be pleased to receive a visit."

The interview was not quite as satisfactory as Frank could have wished; still he had gained his chief point, and could not reasonably complain.

This, too, was decidedly his mother's opinion, when at luncheon that day he related the substance of his conversation with Maisie's father.

"Indeed I think Mr. Daynham acted in a very judicious manner," she remarked, "and I quite approve of his decision. Maisie is too young to be married at present, and if your love for each other be well founded, you can easily afford to wait twelve months; the time will soon slip by."

"I must take a dose of my own medicine and cultivate patience; it is an admirable virtue,"

the young man responded, shrugging his shoulders. "By the way, Wyndham has been down to Whitmore and proposed to Stella."

Mrs. Mackinder looked up with a glance of keen interest.

"And she refused him, of course?"

"Well, she did not accept him," he answered a little impatiently; "though from Wyndham's account I fancy her refusal was not overwhelming. At least he appeared in decent spirits this morning, and informed me he by no means despaired of reversing the verdict."

"Then he does not accept her answer as final?"

"No! Later on he will ask her again."

"I wish I could think his constancy would be ultimately rewarded," and Mrs. Mackinder sighed deeply.

But Frank was far too happy to be long downcast by thoughts of his cousin, and indeed he had but scant opportunity for reflection.

Mr. Daynam was already making preparations for his approaching departure, and naturally it behoved the young people to see as much of each other in the short remaining time as possible.

To this course Maisie's father offered no objection.

As he had stated, the idea of Frank as a son-in-law was by no means distasteful to him; he rather enjoyed the young man's society, and was perfectly willing that in due course Maisie should marry him.

In consequence of this feeling Frank found himself a welcome guest at Mrs. Maddock's house, and one evening he induced Mr. Daynam and Maisie to dine with his mother.

The girl kissed Mrs. Mackinder demurely, and the elder lady, passing her hand softly through the silken tresses, said,—

"I am very glad, my dear, to see you under my roof; I think we shall soon learn to be friends."

"Thank you," answered the girl, simply, "it will be like finding a second mother. My own mother, you know, died years ago, when I was still a little girl."

"Indeed!" remarked her companion in a sympathetic tone; "I was not aware of that."

"Yes! Some day I will tell you all about her. I am very fond of papa, and he is devoted to me, but my life has been very lonely nevertheless. But the loneliness will soon be at an end now; I shall have Frank and you in addition to my father," and she blushed prettily.

Mrs. Mackinder kissed her again, and they descended together to the drawing room where Frank and Mr. Daynam awaited them.

The dinner proved an unequivocal success. Maisie's father was not only a well-educated man but possessed of brilliant conversational powers, and as he described the lovely scenery of his chosen home under the blue Italian sky his hearers listened with delight.

"Your description almost tempts me to desert one's own country," exclaimed Mrs. Mackinder, during a pause in the conversation, "and yet I do not think I could be really happy out of England!"

"Make the trial," exclaimed Mr. Daynam, boldly; "spend your winter with us; we shall only be too glad to receive you."

"Indeed we should," chimed in Maisie enthusiastically; "do promise, Mrs. Mackinder; you cannot imagine how delighted I should be."

Their hostess smiled genially.

"It is very kind of you," she said, "but I must not promise definitely now. Later on I will consider it."

The next day was Maisie's last in England, and in the evening Frank went to the house to bid her farewell.

"Good-bye, darling," he murmured, kissing her fondly; "you will write to me every week, will you not? This parting unnerves me. I have been so happy, and now without you all the sunshine will be taken from my life."

"It will not be for long, dear," she responded. "Even if your mother decides not to come, you will run over, as arranged, in the autumn."

"Maisie," he exclaimed suddenly, "tell me you do not doubt my love!"

She looked up quickly in a half-frightened manner.

"Doubt your love, Frank!" she said tremulously; "if I thought you did not love me it would break my heart."

Once again he held her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

"My darling," he cried, "always remember that I love you. Every day my thoughts will be with you; I shall live only in the hope of our meeting. And then when our period of waiting is over, you will come to me, my love, forever; never again to know the misery of separation. When I am tempted to despond, I shall think of that and take fresh heart."

For the last time they said good-bye, and then Frank, who had already bidden farewell to Mr. Daynam, turned reluctantly away.

It was still early when the young man returned home, and he found that his mother had not yet retired to rest.

"I have had a line from Stella," she observed, handing him an open letter, "we are to expect her to-morrow by the midday train. Will you be at liberty to meet her?"

Naturally the prospect was far from tempting, but since, sooner or later, a meeting was bound to take place, Frank resolved to go.

"Only," he thought to himself dolorously, "I do wish my mother had not couched her suspicions to me! And, perhaps, after all she was mistaken!"

At all events, for Stella's sake, he must act upon that supposition; it would never do to let her know that he had an inkling of her secret.

At the station he noticed that his cousin was looking unusually pale.

"Sick nursing has not improved your health, Stella," he remarked, as he handed the girl into the carriage, "you look far from well."

"Lack of exercise," she responded, "Alice has not been able to go out much," and then they were silent.

Presently Frank made another attempt.

"Did my mother inform you of the news?" he asked. "I know she has written to you."

"Concerning your marriage? Not! but I have heard of it in another quarter. Mr. Hall told me, but he forgot to mention the lady's name."

"Her name is Daynam," he said, "Maisie Daynam. I wish you had not been away, I should have liked you to meet her."

Stella smiled bravely; he should not guess how his words stabbed her, and Frank being a man was easily deceived.

The sight of those impassive features re-assured him, and he breathed more freely.

"The matter was wrong for once," he said to himself, "for which I am extremely thankful."

And meanwhile the girl was fighting hard to stifle her passion and hide the beating of her throbbing heart, and with such success that Frank became more and more confirmed in his fresh opinion.

So certain, indeed, was he of the truth of his conclusions that when later in the day he accidentally encountered Wyndham Hall he said smilingly,—

"I have good news for you, my friend; Stella has returned to town, and you have a capital opportunity of renewing your suit."

How little he dreamed of the misery which that return was yet indirectly to cause him!

CHAPTER VI.

To all outward seeming affairs in the Mackinder household speedily resumed their normal condition.

Maisie was gone, and though Frank often spoke of her to his mother her name was rarely mentioned when Stella was present.

True to his design Wyndham visited the house as often as he was invited, and took every opportunity of proving that his devotion to Stella was as great as ever.

Even amidst the fitful excitement and unrest in which the girl lived his fidelity could not pass unnoticed, and more than once the girl found herself pitying him from her heart.

But her pity, at least as yet, had no element of love in it; she regretted the misery in which his

infatuation must necessarily involve him; the more so because she herself was suffering keenly from an unrequited affection.

From the night when Frank had come home from his solitary and eventful ramble she had felt that there existed a bond between them which nothing could break.

Neither had ever spoken again of Duke Favert's death, but Stella concluded that Frank knew she was aware of his secret, and on her side, at least, the possession of that secret seemed to cement their alliance.

And now the love of years was wasted, utterly thrown away. This unknown girl, with her pink and white baby face, had stolen the affection which by right belonged to herself.

Her heart was indeed bitter, but she bore herself bravely, making no sign.

"If he had never met with her," she said, "he would have been true to me," for she could not rid herself of what after all was an erroneous idea that Frank had intended making her his wife.

It was while still in this state of mind that the girl made an important discovery—a discovery destined to have far-reaching consequences.

She had been making an afternoon call at a friend's house, where one of the lady visitors mentioned Maisie Daynam's name.

Stella listened with beating heart to the conversation which ensued, though it imposed an intense strain upon her to keep from betraying the absorbing interest which she felt.

If this information were correct, and she could hardly doubt it, the engagement between Frank and Maisie was virtually at an end.

She listened intently to every syllable, and concealing her emotion even ventured once or twice to interpose a question, the answer to which would help to make matters more clear to her mind.

Presently the hostess turned to her with a smile.

"By the way, Miss Vyner," she said, sweetly, "I fear we have been extremely indiscreet in our gossip; it has just occurred to me that your cousin is engaged to Maisie; is it not so?"

Stella looked up hastily.

"I do not think there is any actual engagement," she answered, "though there is a kind of understanding."

"Well, we have not done much harm," chimed in Gertrude Featherly, a tall blonde; "it cannot be laid to Maisie's charge that Duke Favert was a —"

"Let us say unfit for polite society," interrupted their hostess. "Besides, if my memory serves me aright, Mr. Mackinder was not unacquainted with the poor fellow's peculiar idiosyncrasies. I believe your cousin was an acquaintance of Duke's."

"Yes," said Stella, faintly; "he knew him at one time, I fancy," and soon after, the conversation having drifted into another channel, she took her departure.

Hastening home she shut herself in her room to think over this new complication.

The more she studied it the more convinced she became that this news would prove the death-blow to Frank's informal engagement.

And it was clearly her duty, even if she had nothing to gain by it, to make him acquainted with the discovery she had accidentally made.

Sooner or later the facts must reach him; indeed, she wondered he had not already learned them, and the longer he remained in ignorance the more bitter would be the revelation both for him and Maisie.

"I must tell him," she cried, passionately; "it is my duty. Knowing what I do, I must not let this engagement continue another day."

"It will be a heavy blow," she murmured, presently; but even as she thought framed itself into words she knew by the joyous throbbing of her heart how gladly she welcomed this chance discovery.

For Frank would be free, free, and who could doubt what would happen when Time had made blunt the keenness of his pain!

She forced herself to go down to dinner, and so well did she control her features that neither

Frank nor his mother had the faintest conception of the tumult of emotions raging in her breast.

Shortly after the conclusion of the evening meal Mrs. Mackinder retired, leaving the other two in the drawing-room.

Frank crossed to the piano and sitting down began to play, while Stella watched him, her face full of pity.

He looked so handsome, so bright and joyous; this face wore such a happy expression, and with a few words she was about to convert this sunshine into gloom.

Could she go through with her self-imposed task? or would her courage fail? At least she must not hesitate, for she recognised fully that each moment's delay would increase her difficulty.

"Frank," she said, timidly, and aroused by the new note in her voice the young man ceased playing.

"Anything the matter, Stella?" he asked, coming to her side.

"Do not be angry with me," she pleaded, "though I fear what I am about to say will cause you much suffering. Still it must be told, and surely it is better to hear it from me than from others!"

"Yes!" he assented, wonderingly, "what is it? you have whetted my curiosity."

"I heard it casually this afternoon," she said; "it has to do with Duke Favert!"

Frank recoiled quickly, as if struck by a sharp blow.

"Duke Favert!" he echoed in amazement; "what of Duke Favert?" and the girl noticed that his face was deadly pale.

Since that fatal night they two had never mentioned the dead man's name; why should Stella disinter the past? he asked himself, helplessly.

Then he grew more calm, and he could have smiled at his childish alarm.

What had he to fear? he had done the man no hurt. Could he be held responsible because a tipsy blackguard had fallen over a cliff?

Yet in spite of this commonsense reasoning there crept into his heart a vague and vain regret that he had not acted in a more straightforward manner.

But how could the dead man affect him now? and looking steadily at his cousin he repeated the question,—

"What of Duke Favert?"

"She answered him by another question."

"Do you know anything of his relatives?"

"No," he said. "I presume he had a mother and father once, but I never heard anything about them."

"The father died when Duke was still a child," the girl said, "and shortly afterwards his mother married for the second time."

There was something almost ludicrous in Frank's growing wonder.

"Whither does all this tend, sweet cos?" he asked, "and why do you look at me so strangely?"

Stella hesitated.

"Can you not guess, Frank?" she said slowly, "have I not made it sufficiently plain? But stop, there is yet one other link. By her second husband Mrs. Favert had a daughter, who was consequently Duke Favert's half-sister. Now, surely you can understand!"

He shook his head.

"My wits must be wool-gathering," he laughed, "for even now I cannot see what all this family history has to do with me."

"Because," she said faintly, "that daughter of whom I have spoken is Maisie Daynham."

Again he started nervously, and recovered himself only by a great effort.

"Are you sure of this?" he asked in husky tones, "are you quite certain that your information is correct?"

"Quite," she answered; "there cannot, unfortunately be the least doubt. Oh, Frank, I am very, very sorry for you," and indeed at that moment the girl was really and truly grieved at the downfall of her cousin's hopes.

The young man paced to and fro, absorbed in thought, and for a time no other sound was heard.

Stella's news was so startling in its character

that it was only by degrees he was able to reason clearly concerning it.

At first, indeed, he came to the same conclusion, though not on precisely similar grounds as Stella—that Maisie was lost to him—he must release her from his half promise and set her free.

Then his strong sense re-asserted itself, and he began to question the expediency and even the wisdom of such a course.

On what grounds did he purpose wrecking the happiness of his own and Maisie's life? His position was awkward, no doubt, and singularly embarrassing; but there existed no real bar to his marriage with the girl he loved.

With regard to Duke Favert's death his conscience was clear. He had committed no crime, either in intent or actual deed; the hapless man had himself alone to blame.

Even if Maisie knew the whole story she would not judge him in fault; but she need never know.

The secret, such as it was, would never be revealed by another; he was the sole witness of what had happened on that luckless night.

That Stella suspected something was patent by the agitation visible in her demeanour, and by the stress which she laid upon the relationship existing between Maisie and the dead man.

But then Stella was his cousin; his loyal and true-hearted friend, who would preserve silence as strict as his own, for he never dreamed of the direction in which her suspicions pointed.

Naturally it would have been preferable had he made no mystery of his meeting with Duke, but that error was committed; it belonged to the past, and could not be repaired.

For it dawned upon him that to speak of it now might involve him in great difficulty, perhaps danger.

No! he had chosen his course, and now it was impossible to draw back; the matter of Duke Favert's death must not be re-opened.

Fortunately for this there was no necessity; he had only to preserve silence and none would be the wiser.

Gradually his brow cleared; the smile returned to his face, and he said,—

"Thanks, cos, for the information you have given, but it need make no difference."

He looked at his watch.

"You will excuse me," he added; "but I have an appointment with Wyndham; probably I shall be late," and, with a bright smile, he left the room leaving the girl staring before her in incredulous amazement.

CHAPTER VII.

As Frank Mackinder admitted the situation was exceedingly embarrassing, not to say painful; but even upon mature reflection he could not see that there existed sufficient reason why he should give Maisie up.

If Duke's death had been due to his agency, either by design or unintentionally, the matter would have been different; but conscious of his innocence he felt that he would be doing violence to no law by marrying Maisie.

No one actually knew that he had seen Duke Favert on the night of the latter's death, and only Stella suspected it.

From Stella there was nothing to be feared. Practically she knew little more than the rest of the world, and that little she would not divulge.

"I will tell her the whole story in the morning," he murmured, turning into his club, "and she will agree with me that it is best for Maisie to be kept in ignorance of the unfortunate mishap."

The one fatal flaw in his argument was his ignorance of Stella's preconceived opinion that he was in reality responsible for the death of Maisie's half-brother.

Not that she had any ideas of a vulgar murder either in hot or cold blood; but she did most thoroughly believe that Frank's hands pushed the luckless man over the cliff during the course of a stormy altercation, culminating, most probably, in a violent and desperate struggle.

And in justice to Stella it should be noted that

many little details combined to give colour to this view.

She could not doubt that her cousin met Duke Favert on that evening, and his subsequent actions were hardly those of an innocent man.

If he had done no wrong how was it possible to account for his silence?

The incident of the missing button, too, was a strong corroboration of her theory, which was still further strengthened by the memory of his haggard features.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, he was going to marry Maisie! It was incredible! She must have been dreaming! surely, surely she could not have heard aright! What was it he had said! She tapped her forehead reflectively. "It did not matter!" Yes, that was it; that was what her cousin thought of it.

How horrible! how callous!

Long time she sat thinking, thinking; her brain on fire, her breast torn with conflicting emotions.

The weapon in her hand had broken like a hollow reed.

But it must not, it should not be! For Frank's sake, for Maisie's sake, she must prevent this marriage.

Fiercely she repulsed all ideas of self; she would act only for Frank's happiness, and, paradoxical as it may seem, in this she was perfectly sincere.

How could those two ever be really united with this eternal barrier between them?

Frank was weak and foolish. She would save him from his own folly, and some day he would thank her.

She smiled to herself at the thought, and rising slowly went to her room. Her mind was far too excited for her to reason calmly about the course she intended to adopt.

She could think of but one thing. To put it out of her cousin's power any longer to conceal the truth.

Neither must there be any delay; she knew Frank's powers of persuasion too well to give him a hint of her plan.

Taking a sheet of note-paper from the little desk she wrote a few words hurriedly, as if her courage might break down, and addressed an envelope to Miss Maisie Daynham.

Then in the same hurried way she put on a hat and jacket, and running quickly downstairs let herself out into the street.

Half-an-hour later she returned, and taking off her things sat down by the window.

Several hours passed before Frank came home; but meanwhile she had not changed her position.

"Poor Frank!" she murmured, as she heard her cousin go to his room, "poor Frank! it will be hard to bear; but after all it is the truest kindness."

Meantime that young man had quite recovered from the shock which Stella's communication had temporarily caused. He would take the opportunity of confining everything to his cousin the next day, and then he would banish the affair finally from his mind.

"Stella!" he said after breakfast, "can you come into the library for a few minutes? I will not keep you long."

"He intends to talk me into silence," the girl thought; but, aloud, she said, "Certainly, Frank; I will come now."

"I trust I am not to be the victim of the conspiracy," remarked Mrs. Mackinder, smilingly.

"Have no fear, mother," rejoined the young man, "we are not likely to disturb your peace of mind."

"Perhaps Frank intends making me a handsome birthday present, and is desirous of consulting my taste beforehand," but though the girl forced her lips to smile her heart was troubled.

"Stella!" said the young man abruptly as he closed the library-door, "it is about Maisie, and—the story you told me last night."

"Yes," she said, and her voice trembled. It was as she had expected. He intended persuading her to keep silent.

"Do you know," he continued, "I fancied last night that you were rather displeased with me; that in fact you were of the opinion I ought to relinquish my design of marrying Maisie."

She looked at him, coldly. "I thought so last night," she said, with deliberate emphasis, "and I am not likely to alter my view."

"But why?" he asked, despondently. "Can you take your mind back to the night of Duke Pavert's death and still ask me that question?"

"Your standpoint is decidedly too puritanical for me," he returned, with a shrug of the shoulders. "The occurrence was unfortunate, and one to be deplored, but I cannot perceive why it should be allowed to ruin the happiness of two lives. Besides, even if she heard the story I do not believe Maisie would wish to be released from her promise."

Stella listened to this statement in amazement. Was she dreaming, or was Frank? What was he saying? If Maisie knew she would still marry him!

Frank waited for her to speak, but finding she maintained silence he resumed.

"Of course I would greatly prefer that the poor child should be kept in ignorance, more especially as no possible good can be effected by reopening the matter, and such a course will be extremely simple. Besides yourself, no one has the faintest suspicion that I was unlucky enough to meet Duke Pavert on the night of his accidental death."

"Accidental! Frank!"

The exclamation came from the girl involuntarily, but it maddened her to hear him discussing the affair with what she considered such unbecoming levity.

The young man gazed at his cousin curiously; did she imagine he had killed the man?

Laying one hand lightly on her shoulder he said—

"Stella, look at me. I acted foolishly, very foolishly, that night, but it was for the *mother's* sake, not my own. I had nothing to fear, but I wished to spare the dear little woman the pain of a public scandal. You know Duke and I were bitter enemies, and why—but let that pass. Well, on that wretched evening I met him on Mahomet's Bridge, and he recognised me. Incited by the drink he had taken he attempted to pick a quarrel with me. Realising the danger of his position I endeavoured to pacify him, but in vain. Each moment augmented his blind rage, and in trying to strike me his foot slipped."

"And there was not even a struggle!" Stella said.

"No! I did not raise my hand; the event was an accident pure and simple. The sole fault which I committed was in keeping silence."

"And you never knew that the button which the police picked up came from your covert coat?"

"It did not," he responded simply; "I examined my coat directly you mentioned the fact of a button having been found; it gave me a great fright at the time."

Even in the midst of her fresh agony the girl was tempted to smile at the recollection of her own dexterity.

"It was yours nevertheless," she said; "I sewed on a fresh one, because—because, oh, Frank, I thought you had killed the wretched man," and she burst into tears.

The young man crossed her hand.

"Do not cry, sweet cog," he exclaimed, earnestly; "it was all my fault I should have told you the truth that night. So that was why you held I should give up Maisie! But you agree with me now, do you not? This miserable business ought not to keep us apart."

But in spite of his words the girl, stung by a keen remorse, continued to sob bitterly.

Frank had been weak, but what was his weakness compared with hers!

She thought of that hateful letter—mute witness of her disloyalty, even now speeding to its destination, and groaned aloud.

"Oh, Frank, Frank!" she cried through her sobs, "forgive me, I did not know; I thought—oh! I do not know what I thought; and now, perhaps, I have ruined your life. Leave me, Frank; when you learn what I have done you will hate to look upon my face."

The young man stood completely mystified by this outburst. What did the girl mean by these wild incoherent words!

"Stella!" he said, anxiously, "what is the matter! You have done me no harm. Nay! I have I not much for which to thank you? I do not blame you for having put a false construction upon my actions; I owe you gratitude for your attempt to screen me."

"You do not know," she muttered. "Oh! how I hate and loathe myself. But I would not have done it, Frank, had I known the truth! But I could not have let you marry her with her brother's blood on your hands."

Now seriously alarmed, he urged the sobbing girl to make her meaning plain, and little by little, between her outbursts, he gathered the substance of what she had done.

Like the true, gallant-hearted man that he was, he did not add to his cousin's grief by any display of anger; on the contrary, he redoubled his exertions to soothe her anguish.

"Do not grieve, dear cog," he said, cheerfully; "perhaps, after all, your action will be productive of good, for when I have explained this to Maisie there will not remain a single secret between us."

The girl looked up at him gratefully.

"Heaven bless you for your kindness, Frank," she said, "you deserve to be happy."

"Now I must go and telegraph," he said; "I will tell the *mother* I have been called away unexpectedly; she need never know anything about this. Get me a few things packed. I can catch the evening boat, and in a few days I trust everything will be satisfactorily settled."

He pressed her hand once more and went out, taking care that his features should betray no sign of the anxiety which was slowly creeping into his heart.

For at that moment a cruel thought struck him. Suppose Maisie should not believe his story! But no, he would not suppose it, such a thing was absolutely impossible.

She loved him, and her own heart would assure her of his innocence.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A LETTER for you, Maisie, London postmark, lady's handwriting unfamiliar; probably contains a detailed description of new ball-dress, and the latest society scandal. Catch! I am going to devote the next half-hour to a study of yesterday's *Times*."

Maisie was seated on the terrace of a pretty villa overlooking a beautiful Italian lake, and she turned with a smile of indolent enjoyment to catch the letter which Mr. Daynam threw lightly towards her.

"It does not come from any of my regular correspondents," she remarked, looking closely at the address; "how very strange! I wonder from whom it can be!"

"Easily discoverable," responded her father, who was lazily cutting the printed sheets; "here, I will lend you my paper-knife."

"Not a very voluminous account," he added, as she drew out the sheet of note-paper; "it will not take up much of your valuable time."

But the girl did not hear him; she was staring hard at the paper in her hand, and her face was white.

Meantime, absorbed in his article, Mr. Daynam went on reading, unconscious of the startling change in his daughter's appearance.

Presently an accidental turn of the head caused him to see her face, and flinging down the paper, he crossed hastily to her side.

"Good Heavens, Maisie!" he exclaimed, in a tone of alarm, "what is it! What has happened!"

For answer the girl handed him the paper with a wavy smile.

"Read!" she whispered, "and tell me what it means."

Mr. Daynam cast his eyes over the meagre contents of the note.

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AS IT FELL UPON A DAY.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE two men faced each other in silence for a moment.

There was something in Sebastian Lithgow's aspect, in the fixed expression of his white stern face, that told Hamilton that some tremendous obstacle was dropped unexpectedly in the pathway of his success.

An unconscious desire for supremacy over this cousin or guardian of Rachel's sprang up in Giles' mind. He resented, without really quite understanding why, the mere fact of this other man's presence in Rachel's house.

He felt inclined to curse Bastian in the easy callous way he was wont to curse anything that annoyed him.

The remembrance, however, of his strong position, of his real supremacy of power over everyone else where Rachel was concerned, brought a sudden and soothing reaction of thought.

He made no salutation or acknowledgment of Bastian's entrance; he stood in a masterful sort of way on the hearthrug.

"I am here to see Lady Castletown," he said, making his voice quietly insolent, as he knew well how to do.

Bastian advanced towards the table.

"I represent Lady Castletown," he answered, and the absolute contempt, the abhorrence he had for this handsome scoundrel, had place in every note of his voice.

Giles Hamilton looked at him.

"This is very good of you," he said with a sneer, "and I appreciate your kindness; but I prefer to see Lady Castletown in person, if you please."

Bastian still kept his eyes fixed on the wall-looking face opposite.

"I do not please that you shall see Lady Castletown," he said calmly.

Hamilton laughed at this.

"Are you Lady Castletown's keeper, then?" he sneered.

"I am her representative now and at any time when it should be considered necessary to hold intercourse with you."

A deep flush spread over Hamilton's face.

"You speak strangely, Mr. Lithgow," he said.

Bastian bent his head.

"Plainly—I hope," he remarked in his own quiet way.

Captain Hamilton jerked his shoulders.

"I find your plain speaking the height of impertinence."

"And I," Bastian said, a touch of fierceness breaking through the calmness for a moment, "and I find your presence here a piece of unmitigated blackguardism."

Hamilton laughed again sharply; there was a deep red mark across his brow as Bastian's scorn broke from him so uncontrollably.

"You are certainly a man of plain words," he observed coolly. "It would of course be my privilege to demand an explanation of such words did I not remember that you are Rachel's cousin, and—"

Bastian put out his hand and stopped him.

"Let us understand one another at once," he said sternly. "The butler informed you you were in a sense expected; he had received his orders that you should be admitted if you came, for this one, and only time. Now you are here I shall be obliged if you will state your reason for coming."

Giles pulled up a chair and seated himself in it calmly.

"I came to see my wife," he said; for one instant he half expected to catch a look of dismayed surprise on the man's face opposite.

Bastian did not move a muscle, however, and Hamilton quickly realized that this cousin of Rachel's was not merely fully cognizant of the true situation, but was determined to make himself exceedingly disagreeable in consequence.

Bastian, though so calm outwardly, had a moment of acute anguish as he heard Rachel

called "wife" by this man; but he had passed through so many phases of suffering since the morning that he was completely master of himself now, and his strongest, most eager feeling at this moment was to wrest from Hamilton all that was possible to him to take, and to stand for ever between Rachel and the consequences of her most lamentable act.

The contempt, and anger, and hatred he felt for such a man as this was almost a revelation to Bastian; his very nature seemed to be revolutionised in such a moment, when influenced by such a new, and in a sense evil, passion.

He answered Giles quite coldly.

"Lady Castletown is unable to see you. She left London this morning, and begged me to remain and meet you, to deliver certain messages to you on her behalf."

The man opposite looked nonplussed for a moment.

The news that Rachel had gone was a most unpleasant surprise, in fact, the knowledge that she had so quickly unburdened her secret to her cousin was exceedingly annoying to him.

He began to see that his triumph was likely to be a very empty one. His pretence of courtesy vanished as he answered Bastian.

"A duty you are evidently delighted to fulfil," he said sullenly. Then he looked up sharply.

"You seem to have been strangely sure of seeing me," he added with a sneer.

Bastian's lips smiled faintly.

"Yes, I have not studied your type so closely without coming to some strong conclusions about you and all like you. When my cousin told me of the fatal thing she did this morning, she spoke to me also of certain conditions which she said she had exacted from you, and had imagined would have been honoured by you, although she realized, of course, that they carried no enforced safeguard to her."

"She is even yet a child in many things," said Bastian, with a quiver in his voice. "She still has faith in the goodness and honesty of humanity, and when she exacted a condition from you she believed absolutely that you would abide by that condition."

"It was my duty to awaken her to the blindness and impotency of this faith. I took upon myself to tell her how little reliance was to be put upon your 'honour,' Captain Hamilton, and to urge her at once to set a barrier between herself and you, so that she might be saved the trouble of meeting you!"

Hamilton rose from his chair; he was deadly pale, and his eyes had a fierce gleam in them.

"D—n you!" he said, in a choked sort of way.

Bastian smiled again, that faint smile that had something of an insult in it.

"You will allow, I think, that my perception was not at fault," he said in the same even voice, "since in the course of a half dozen hours you break easily a solemn promise which was to have lasted a year. However," Bastian said with a sudden change of voice, "however, we are not here now to go into disquisitions on your curious notions of honesty and honour, we are here to discuss the future. Lady Castletown has informed me of her marriage with you at the — street Registry office this morning. I am fully prepared to be met by you with all the assurance of one who can make certain claims by right of law; but I think it best to state now at the very commencement that I intend to deny you the faintest chance of making good a single one of the claims and rights you may put forward. As long as there is a breath of life in my body I mean to stand between you and this poor foolish child whom you have married; it is not merely the wrong you have done to her that forces me into such an attitude, it is the remembrance that you are the betrayer, the murderer almost, of poor Eleanor Foster, that determines me to adopt a course of action which shall demonstrate to you that you are no longer master of the situation."

Giles listened with an outward guise of calmness amounting to indifference; he had gone back to the fireplace, and had assumed his first attitude of easy insolence.

"Of course," he said quietly as Bastian stopped. "Of course you are well aware that you are talking a vast amount of bombastic nonsense. We are not living in a mediæval age; people have to conform to laws and regulations nowadays, and the possibility of any person endeavouring to stand between a man and his wife is one of those things which the law quickly determines, as no doubt you are aware."

"The fact that you have some kinship with my wife, that you are pleased to express disapproval of our marriage, and that you are farther pleased to express this same disapproval most openly to me, are facts which are indisputable; but do not for an instant imagine that I accept your transpontine threat in a serious light. I fortunately know my position too well to allow of any impertinent interference between my wife and myself either now or at any future time. The matter lies in a nutshell," Giles continued, examining approvingly his white hands as he went on speaking. "For good or evil Rachel has become my wife; there is an old adage which says 'all is fair in love or war,' and if to obtain an end I resorted to certain strategy I have any amount of precedent upon which to fall back in excuse and explanation of this fact. In loving Rachel I have committed no crime, neither did I coerce her to the marriage. She is a free woman; she is of age now, and of her own free will she chose to become my wife! If you have any real objection to urge against my demanding my full rights as the husband of a woman who so willingly permitted herself to marry me, tell them to me. I promise you they shall have my fullest attention."

He paused with a smile and looked across the room at Bastian, who stood with his arms crossed over his breast, his head a little bowed.

"To introduce the subject of any former intrigue is really, as you must see yourself, a foolish argument. My life has been no worse or no better than hundreds of other men's lives. I made no pretence of virtue or eccentric innocence to Rachel. Had she probed the matter I might have made certain confessions to her; but she asked no questions, she demanded no knowledge of my past, she was content to take me as I am, and to marry me." He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, really I can see no reason for Rachel to have married me unless she had particularly desired to do so."

He paused again, and waited for Bastian to speak; but Bastian had no words ready for the moment. His great honest heart was a chaos of suffering; he had a sense of feebleness upon him as he listened to the plausible easy voice of the man opposite.

His own common sense taught him to recognise the worldly wisdom that ran through every word Giles Hamilton uttered; but his deep, true sympathetic understanding of Rachel's beautiful unworldly nature outweighed the wisdom.

He knew that ninety-nine people out of a hundred would have seen the prosaic value of Hamilton's argument; but then where, in many hundreds of people, would one meet with a girl like Rachel? And how could he, above all the world, stand forth and plead the cause, the mad, wild foolishness that had driven the girl to do so fatal a thing so easily?

Would this man opposite, with his consummate defence of his own misdeeds, with his sophistry, his callous indifference to his wrongdoing, his utterly detestable doctrines even grasp for one instant the passion that had driven Rachel to such desperation? The question was answered before it was formed almost, and Bastian had a fierce and eager feeling upon him to keep all knowledge of the truth, where he was concerned, from Hamilton.

The road ahead looked black and bitter enough; but what might not be added to the burden if this man were to guess Rachel's secret? Thought followed on thought as he stood there so silent. He was not permitting himself to be beaten by Giles's seeming mastery of the situation.

Honour, chivalry, shame and remorse were as so many dead things to this man—so handsome to look upon, so destructive in his smiling evilness; but fortunately Bastian had other weapons than these to fight with.

Giles, having waited for him to speak, went on in the same calm semi-amused voice,—

"That Rachel has now had a reaction of some sort, possibly the outcome of her foolish confidence in you, and your condemnation of what she has done, is very comprehensible," he said; "but that is a phase that will pass in a little while. Had you not seen fit to be here to-night, and to have exercised your cousinly prerogative to drive her away, I feel very sure matters would have ended at once, as they must, of course, end very shortly. I have no objection to Rachel leaving town for a little while, if she wishes to do so. It was her desire that the world should know nothing of our marriage for a time, so perhaps it is just as well she should go; but you will, I know, recognise my right to know where my wife has gone; to be told with whom she intends to stay during our temporary separation, and to be given every possibility of having free access to her if I think fit."

The anger, the hot hatred that was burning in Giles's heart for Bastian at this moment came out now in the gleam of his eyes and in the set expression of his face.

Bastian lifted his head and looked across at the speaker.

"From this moment Rachel has gone out of your reach, out of your life altogether. I am not going to pretend ignorance of all the legality which you can urge, but I mean to be proof against it all. Rachel was not a free agent when she married you. Put forward what argument you may I still repeat she was not a free agent when she did this thing. You are a clever and an unscrupulous man; and you had set your heart on making this child your wife. You have succeeded, and yet you have failed, for though Rachel went through that form of marriage with you this morning she is as little to you, she shall be as little to you, as the ground beneath our feet!"

"Once again I tell you frankly, definitely, I intend to stand if need be for ever between her and the dishonour of being in your life. You can have little knowledge of the sort of nature hers is if you imagine that she would permit herself to exchange one word with you now that she knows you for what you are. You played your cards well when you manoeuvred to get Eleanor Foster out of this house; you knew the danger of her confidential companionship with Rachel too well, and as you feared a confession of the truth before, so you can recognise for yourself now what an overwhelming horror and disgust Rachel holds for one who is so base, so detestably cruel as you are proved to be. Why, she would kill herself willingly," Bastian said quite calmly, "rather than let herself be degraded into so horrible a position a marriage with such a you must signify."

Giles was white to the lips, and across his brow there was that dark ugly crimson flush again.

"She may kill herself if she will," he said, with a snarl and another oath, "but she is my wife all the same. She belongs to me, and I mean to let her know that before many days have gone. You may preach what sentimental tomfoolery you like, but it will avail little, when I set the law in motion, as I shall without loss of a single hour!"

Bastian's hands had a sudden thrill in them, as if they would have found pleasure in twisting themselves about the throat of the man in front of him.

He controlled himself with an enormous effort.

"I beg leave to doubt the value of that last statement," he said, very quietly. "The law is a power, of course. I am the last to deny that; but it is an expensive proceeding, and as such will be of little assistance to a penniless man."

A strange sharp expression passed swiftly over Hamilton's face; he held his breath for one moment, he knew in an instant what was coming, and he was utterly unprepared.

"You have married Rachel," Bastian went on in that same even voice, "but you have not married her money. Perhaps you were not aware, as she herself was not, that on contracting any second marriage she loses a considerable amount of her wealth, and that such money as

she can still claim is so securely settled upon herself that no other creature can touch it.

"I am her trustee, you know, and I had her interest too deeply at heart not to have made all the precautions possible to her becoming the victim of the first fortune hunting scoundrel who chose to single her out for attention. Had you but known her true position everything would have been different. You have succeeded in marrying her against all my precautions, but I hasten to let you know your pecuniary position receives no advantage from this marriage either now or at any time!"

There was a pause after this speech, the eyes of the two men met and crossed swords in that moment of silence. A question that was vital forced itself into a sort of speech in Giles Hamilton's eyes.

Bastian answered that unspoken question quietly.

"The cheque drawn by Lady Castletown, and given you this morning, in all good faith on her part, was worthless, and she had no power to deal with so large a sum of money. I therefore at once despatched a messenger to the bank, and payment has been stopped. It is to be hoped you have not been in undue haste to draw against this money, Captain Hamilton!"

The curse that broke from Hamilton's lips was horrible.

"D— you," he said to Bastian, thickly, hoarsely; he repeated the insult several times, almost wildly.

The blow was, as has just been said, so utterly unexpected, he was quite unequal to meeting it for a moment.

His rage was not so great as his sudden fear at the realisation of what had been done. He was socially ruined now, it had been merely the lavish use of Rachel's name during the past few days, the bold statement to his creditors of his betrothal to her, that had staved off the worst from happening immediately.

He had not lost one instant in paying in Rachel's cheque to his bank, which already had a big debt against him, and he had occupied himself during the afternoon in drawing out cheques of his own, and taking them round to the various tradesmen who had managed to make his life so exceedingly unpleasant during the past months. His brain whirled as he conjured up the fury of these men when they discovered that his supposed good fortune was all a myth, and that they had been fooled by him to this considerable extent.

There was no chance of mercy from any one of them. It would no longer be merely a question of bankruptcy and all its attendant objections, it would be a question now of fraud, and of a necessity for a hurried journey from the country.

He had no pleasant or handsome air as he stood grasping the table with both hands, and staring across at Bastian.

"You've beaten me this time, you devil!" he said between his teeth; he could barely speak at all, his agitation was so great; "but you can't undo one thing, she is my wife, and, by Heaven, I'll let the whole world know it before another day is gone. Ruined as I am she is still my wife, and I'll claim her, and drag her into the gutter with me no matter if you are fifty thousand times her cousin and guardian. You should have played fair my friend, Lithgow; and then you would have been spared the disgraceable of hearing Rachel's name made the common talk of town, and her private life dragged into the publicity of the law courts. She is my wife, I say, and I demand my rights as her husband. Fortune or no fortune I shall force her to come to me, and to recognise me as her master before all the world."

He lifted himself from the table, and took up his hat from the chair; his hands, his whole body were trembling so much he could barely stand. He looked about in a hunted sort of way, and Bastian translated the meaning of that look instantly.

He went across to the massive oak sideboard that spread against one side of the wall, and opening a small cupboard took out a stand of liqueurs and glasses. He poured out some brandy.

"Drink this!" he said, authoritatively, "and then listen to me, Hamilton. We both know the weak places in our armour, therefore the fight is equal. You are a desperate man, and Rachel is a desperate woman. The question of a marriage between you is as impossible as the theory that the moon is made of green cheese. Far better is it for us therefore to stand a moment and review our position. You are on the brink of ruin. I know all your circumstances; I have known them for some time past, and your marriage with Rachel was to be your salvation, that was why you sought her. There is no undoing what is done, we all know that, and there is little good in fighting against impossibilities. Fortunately there remains to us a compromise."

Giles, who had tossed off the brandy, and whose self-control and bravado had come back by degrees, gave a little laugh.

"Ah! there is a compromise, is there?" he said, sneeringly.

Bastian instantly changed his manner; a moment before he had been almost sorry for the man, for he knew well Giles had passed through about as much mental suffering in that moment as a man of his calibre could experience.

He had spoken more gently, not merely on an impulse but because he had promised Rachel everything should be arranged comfortably, and that Hamilton should be assisted simply on his mother's account.

"If Giles is ruined it will break his mother's heart," Rachel had said in a dull low voice, as little by little the odious position had been talked out between them; "she worships him. I do not think I should have gone so far on the road I have travelled if it had not been for Mrs. Hamilton. Poor woman, she is dying; do not let us do anything to embitter her last few days of life. I never could have imagined," Rachel had added, with a wan flickering smile, "that it would have been possible for me to grow to care so much for Mrs. Hamilton of Corby. Don't you remember, Bastian, how frightened I always was of her in the old days? I am not frightened now—only sorry for her, so sorry! You may punish him as you like, but be thoughtful to her, Bastian; I think I could be even more unhappy than I am if she suffered through me."

"Leave it to me, dear," Bastian had said, gently, and her low sad-toned words came back to him as he stood facing the man who had so utterly blighted his yearning hope and blotted out the golden sunshine of love and joy for him.

"You mistake if you think I am anxious for a compromise," he answered Giles, curdly. "I am far too conscious of my power in this matter to condescend to any sort of bargain. We will let the business rest as it is; we have both been explicit with one another, and for my part I beg to tell you there will be no going from the determination I have made to you. I suggested a compromise purely on your behalf."

He turned as if to open the door, and so end the interview; but Giles interposed quickly.

"I accept a compromise," he said sullenly; "what do you want me to do; whatever it is you may be pretty sure of getting it. When a man is in such a hole as I am he does not stick at a trifle, as I dare say you know. You want me to resign all claim to Rachel, I suppose. Well," he laughed recklessly, "it will have to be a pretty big sum if I consent to that. It is true you have got the upper hand now, but I'm not the chap to accept a defeat easily, and if I'm driven out of the country to-morrow I shall always return and always demand and obtain my rights!"

He spoke defiantly; but Bastian knew how much faith to put in this defiance. There was, of course, an element of truth in what Giles said; but then there was a very wide abyss in front of him, which he would have to leap somehow before he could carry any threat into practice; moreover, Bastian knew his man; to snatch at the help of the moment was the creed of all who lived such lives as Hamilton was doing, and there was beyond and above all else his own desire to carry back to Rachel the assurance that the matter had been settled, and that she might have the relief of peace if never again the happiness of freedom.

He cut short Giles's words.

"These are my terms," he said sternly, and sitting down by the table he put in a few brief words, the conditions on which he would help Hamilton to weather this crisis, and shield the child he loved so tenderly from the full and most miserable consequences of her rash folly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WEAKNESS, amounting to a lethargy, fell upon Rachel after she had cast the whole burden of her trouble upon Bastian's shoulders.

She had been living in such a whirlwind of emotion the last week or so that a reaction was inevitable; nevertheless, Bastian was alarmed by her condition.

"Oh, send me away—let me go to the other end of the world—somewhere where I shall see no one who can remind me of this odious thing I have done," she had said to him wildly more than once in their long, long interview.

"You cannot go alone, dear," Bastian had said; but here Rachel was resolute.

"Yes—yes, I will go alone; don't send me with Anne, and oh, Bastian, promise me—promise that Anne shall know nothing. It would kill me to see her eyes. How she would scorn me!"

Bastian had shaken his head at this.

"Anne loves you too well. You cannot think how much she loves you, Rachel; but you can trust me. She shall not know as long as we can keep the secret from her."

Rachel gave him a grateful look from her beautiful eyes, so grey, and so unutterably unhappy.

"I shall go to the sea," she said to him a little while later. "I don't feel as if I could live through another day in town. I want air—I want space—I will take Sylvie with me; we will go to Nestville."

She named a little seaside place where they had been wont to go as children, and a light as of pleasure flitted across her face at thought of the quiet, well-remembered spot; then her brows and lips contracted.

"But oh, Bastian, if he should come?"

Bastian soothed her as gently as he knew how.

"You are going to leave everything to me, are you not, Rachel, dear?"

She rested her head back against the chair and closed her eyes.

"Yes; everything—everything," she whispered.

The tears broke from under her dark lashes; Bastian had left her abruptly. To stay was too great a strain upon him in this moment.

He had given her Eleanor's address before he went, and he had urged Rachel to make her departure from town immediately.

"Do not trouble about my mother or Anne, I will make everything right with them," he had said.

Rachel, after he had gone, had sat on in that big arm chair in her boudoir like one who was too exhausted to move or think. Her calmness was only outward.

Words fail to describe the chaotic misery of the girl's heart; the aching despair that crowded upon her; at moments when she realized all that she had done, all that lay before her, she felt as if it would be a mercy to lose the power of thought altogether.

It was only the memory of Bastian's goodness and of poor Eleanor that helped her to conquer the wild passion of hopeless regret, of self-contempt that overwhelmed her.

She dragged herself by-and-by to her writing-table, and scrawled a few tender loving words to the poor creature whom she had cast out of her heart so utterly the past week.

She shrank from seeing Eleanor just yet; but it was all part of the dread she had of meeting with anyone who could guess the depths of her folly and exclaim at her strange act.

"Forgive me, Nell. I have wronged you. Oh! how I have wronged you!" she wrote, and she repeated the words to herself many times in a changed hoarse voice. The story Bastian had given her of poor Eleanor's betrayal and after-



RACHEL WATCHED BASTIAN GO FROM HER WITH A HEART THAT WAS ON FIRE.

sufferings lay on Rachel's heart like a burning weight.

Her feeling towards Giles Hamilton was so intense in its bitter hatred, in its shocked sense of outraged dignity, that she was scarcely sane when she allowed thought of him to rise above the others.

As the day passed she grew calmer because she grew weaker.

Bastian returned to the house several times, and lastly, about evening, he drove with her to the station and put her into the train with one of her maid-servants. At the last moment Rachel had turned from the thought of being alone with Sylvie, her French maid.

"She will ask questions with her eyes, even if she does not open her lips. I never knew any one who is such a perpetual query as Sylvie," she said, with a faint touch of her old pretty impatience and nonsense. "I will take poor Nell's maid; she is a nice girl, and she is stolid."

When Bastian came to convey her to the train he brought with him a certain rough-haired mongrel who had had a home with him for two or three years past.

"Will you give Bobby a little sea air and some sea bathing, Rachel?" he asked in a light way as he put the leather thong of the dog's leading strap into her hand.

Rachel's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh! can you spare him, Bastian?" she said, quickly.

She knew so well the bond of love that existed between this funny affectionate dumb animal and its master.

She took the dog up in her arms as Bastian merely nodded his head.

"I love him," she said, half passionately. "He will do me good, he is such a dear thing; more like a human creature than an animal, and then he belongs to you."

They parted at the station with a lingering hand-clasp.

"I will run down to-morrow, dear," Bastian said, "and I will forget nothing. Eleanor has

had your letter already. I am going now to see my mother. To-morrow I shall be with you. You will tell me you have slept well, and I know you will be safe now Bobby is with you!"

Rachel had spent four long peaceful days at the seaside. Something of her old look had come back to her face after Bastian's first visit to Nestville, and after she had heard all he had to tell.

They had gone out to the rough shore, where the moss-covered rocks shone emerald green in the sunshine, and there Rachel listened to what had been done.

"He, he will leave England; he will resign his commission," she repeated, in a voice that was a sigh; "but will not this be a sorrow to his mother, and will, will—" she had to pause before she could go on. "Bastian," she said, then in a whisper, "do you trust him? will this money satisfy him? will he really never, never trouble me again?"

Bastian answered her bravely,—

"The man has gone out of your life, Rachel; it is a solid bargain between us. If he should attempt to play false he knows how much mercy to expect; and there is that in his life of which I know that would quickly bring him into the hands of the law. It is true he will occasionally visit England; but you need never know when he is here, and he is not likely to jeopardise a steady income for the sake of showing me his defiance."

Rachel had given a deep sigh, and had turned her eyes out seawards. Away close to the edge of the waves Bobby was scampering about dragging a huge clump of seaweed with his teeth and sending the air with shrill barks of delight; she smiled faintly at the excitement of the little animal, and then she looked back at him, their eyes met and the colour came to her cheeks while her heart thrilled.

"How shall I thank you, Bastian?" she said in a whisper; "how good you are, how good!" She put out her hand involuntarily. "You will never forsake me, Bastian," she added, half passionately.

"I, I could never live with you far away from me."

Bastian let her hand rest on his. His grave face was transfigured by a look that came for one instant into his eyes, then he just touched her hand gently, and rising, walked away from her down to the water's edge where Bobby was.

Rachel watched him go from her with a heart that was on fire.

"He will leave me," she said to herself; "not just yet, he will not go while he thinks I really need him; but he will go, and then," she hid her face suddenly in her hands and she shivered.

Was it a presentiment that mingled with her pain that brought that shiver? a presentiment of the time when she would have to stand alone and take up the burden of her life?

When Bastian's strong tender hand would be powerless to push aside her husband's claims and the degradation that her miserable marriage could force upon her!

(To be continued.)

CARPETS were introduced into England during the reign of Mary, in 1553. They were then considered effeminate.

ONE of the most remarkable sights to be seen in Australia is a burning mountain eighteen hundred and twenty feet in height. The mountain is supposed to be underlain with an inexhaustible coal seam which in some way became ignited. It was burning long before the advent of white men to that part of the country.

An automatic nail driver is a late invention. It is arranged with slides and run-ways, into which the nails drop through fitted courses that necessitate their going in right end first. As the nail, in proper position, slides down through one of these channels, a hammer automatically comes to the attack and drives the nail into place. A tack-driving machine of the same sort is also made.



"QUICK, QUICK!" CRIED GRAVEN; "THERE IS TREACHERY ABOUT."

THE GREYSTOKE MYSTERY.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER.

It is seven or eight months later, and the scene of our story has changed from the old-world-forsaken Trisnant Castle to the bright, gay, fashionable little city of Brussels, where Mr. Butler, his daughter and Vera Graham have been staying, on their way home to England.

For three months they have been travelling on the Continent, trying to bring back the roses to Mabel's pale cheeks, but with very little success. Since their departure from Wales a curious change had manifested itself in the erstwhile bright young girl; she seemed to have sobered down and grown much older; her rippling laugh was heard less frequently, her merry tongue was more silent, her walk was slower, and altogether she was different. Moreover, there was a certain pathetic look in her pretty blue eyes that seemed to Mr. Butler like that of the accusing angel, and made him groan inwardly while he cursed outwardly at the wicked obstinacy and wilfulness of young girls in general and of his own daughter in particular!

Vera did what she could to put matters straight, but her efforts were crowned with a very small measure of success.

Mabel declared that no power on earth should make her give up her lover, and Vera quite sympathised with this declaration. Mr. Butler, on the other hand, characterised Dr. Harcourt as an "impetuous fortune hunter," and vowed that nothing should induce him to accept him as a son-in-law.

At last Mabel's health imperatively demanded a change, and the old gentleman in alarm took both girls across the Channel and tried what constant gaiety and excitement would do for them.

Unfortunately it did very little. Both Vera

and Mabel seemed to have lost interest in the balls and parties that most girls of their age delight in, while Mr. Butler himself was reduced to a state of speechless indignation by the failure of the natives of the different countries he visited to understand his efforts to address them in their own language.

Consequently he made up his mind to go back to London again; and the next day they were to start for Ostend.

The two young girls had been out shopping, and were on their way up the broad-carpeted stairs of the hotel when, as they reached the top, they were met by a short, thin, clean-shaven man, who, after a swift glance at Vera, took off his hat to her.

Her face flushed crimson. She bent her head haughtily enough in return to James Wickham's salutation, and would have passed on had he not—after a slight hesitation—followed her.

"Excuse me, Miss Graham, but might I have a few minutes' conversation with you?" His tone and manner were perfectly respectful, and his attitude was that of one who asks a favour.

At first Vera was half inclined to refuse, but on second thoughts she opened the door of the sitting-room, and motioned to him to come in, while Mabel passed on to her own apartment.

Curiously enough, the detective seemed slightly embarrassed as he took the chair she indicated.

He twirled his soft hat round and round in his fingers, and was silent for a few moments.

"I did not expect to meet you here, Miss Graham," he observed at length, rather lamely.

"I daresay not," she returned frigidly.

"Nevertheless, I am glad the chance has occurred, because I have often thought I should like to have some conversation with you about—about the events that happened at the Grange last year."

Vera rose hastily and with undoubted agitation.

"Then I must decline, once and for all, to discuss them with you. That is a painful page of my life, which I had hoped was over and done

with. I have tried my best to forget it. There is no utility in raking it up."

"Pardon me if I disagree with you. We never quite got to the bottom of that mystery; perhaps we never shall, but I, for one, should like to know the whole truth about it. I wouldn't venture to say this to you if I hadn't some grounds to go upon. Of course I know it's painful, but I have an idea it would be to your benefit if the whole thing were threshed out."

He looked at her very intently. The earnestness of his manner impressed her in spite of herself.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "And why should you take such an interest in the matter?"

"I will tell you. When charge of a case is given me I am never satisfied unless I think I have discovered all there is to discover. Now, in the case of the Greystoke Mystery I never flattered myself that I had come to the bottom of it. There was something behind. Perhaps I shouldn't have thought so much about it if I hadn't come across old Deborah Thrupp a little while ago, and she said something that put me on the qui vive again. That was what made me determined to speak to you when I saw you."

"But you are not in Brussels for that purpose, are you?"

The detective smiled.

"Bless you, no. I am after a gentleman who has disappeared from a bank, taking with him some valuable securities, and what's more, I have been lucky enough to track him. This time tomorrow he'll be delivered over to the English authorities, or I'm much mistaken."

"It was when I was engaged to run down some corners that I met old Deborah—her son was one of the worst of the gang, and she was living with him at the time I nabbed him."

"She was very ill—dying, in fact. Her husband had served her a very shabby trick—he had hooked it to America with all the money, and it was a tidy bit, they had saved out of the

Greystoke Grange affairs, and the poor old thing was penniless.

"I got her a few things she wanted, and in return asked her some questions. But she was wily to the last, and it was precious little I got out of her. Still, she said one thing that struck me, and it was when your name was mentioned."

"It was hard on Miss Vera," she said; "but not so hard as she thought. If she ever gets to know the truth she'll have no need to be ashamed of her father after all." Now what do you make out of that, Miss Graham?"

Vera shook her head slowly.

"I can make nothing out of it."

"Doesn't it seem to point to the conclusion that your father was not the murderer of Mr. Frank St. John?"

"But he confessed his crime," muttered the girl from between white lips.

"I am aware of it—I witnessed his confession, and yet I believe that was what Deborah Thrupp meant."

"Oh, if it only might be so," breathed Vera, almost in a whisper, and clasping her hands fervently together. "I would give five—nay, ten years of my life to know it."

Wickham's eyes had hardly once left her face, and, oddly enough—for he was by no means a soft-hearted man—he was struck with a sort of compunction as he recognised how much she had altered.

For that alteration not he, but her father's crime, was answerable, and yet he had been the means of bringing that crime home to Caleb Graham, and he almost felt as if he were, in a sense, guilty of stealing the joy from her young life.

Beauty is a wonderfully potent power, and its spell had been cast over this matter-of-fact detective.

Not that his admiration for Vera was of a nature to displease the cheery good-tempered little wife he had at home in London—only he was much more inclined to put himself out of the way for the sake of this beautiful girl than he would have been if she had been old and ugly!

There was another reason, too, why he was anxious to probe deeper into the Greystoke mystery, and that was for the sake of his own credit.

It is true he had been well rewarded by Maurice St. John, but all the same the case had been unsatisfactory—it had not been pursued quite to its bitter end, as he would have liked it to be.

"Would you think it impertinent if I asked you to give me a few details concerning your own life?" he said presently.

Vera looked surprised.

"What has my life to do with what we have been discussing?" she queried.

"That remains to be seen. We detectives have to reason *backwards* rather than *forwards*, you know, Miss Graham, and it is quite possible you may provide me with useful suggestions without in the least being aware of it."

The young girl thereupon gave him a sketch of her career, he, meanwhile, making notes in a pocket-book.

The story of her life was very short and uneventful up to the time of her arrival at Greystoke, and it did not take long to narrate.

When she had finished Wickham nodded intelligently.

"Let me see if I understand you aright. Up to the time of your father's second marriage you were continually with him; he was loving and generous to you, and you were, very naturally, devoted to him."

"He was a student, but not a recluse; on the contrary, he liked the society of his fellow creatures, and he gave no signs the misanthropical habits which he developed during his residence at the Grange."

"By your step-mother's wish you were sent to school; for some time after that you heard from your father constantly, then there was a gap; no letters came, and you learned he was ill."

"When the letters recommenced you noticed a great change in the tone of them—it puzzled

you and continued to puzzle you all the time you were at school."

"You never came home for the holidays, and you stayed at school longer than most girls do. Have I stated the facts correctly?"

"Perfectly correct."

"Now I should like to see some of those letters sent you by your father—some of the earlier and later ones. Will you allow me to do this?"

"Unfortunately, it is impossible. I destroyed all my correspondence after leaving the Grange."

The detective rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Ah, that is a pity. Still we must look elsewhere for our information. Where did your father live before settling down at the Grange?"

"He and his wife seem to have travelled about. They visited all the capitals in Europe—this one amongst the rest. Indeed, now I come to think of it, I remember that Brussels was the last place I heard from before that gap I have mentioned to you. I think they must have been staying here sometime. I can fix the time more especially because my father wrote to me on my birthday, and sent me a little pocket-book as a present."

"I suppose that pocket-book is worn out?"

"No; I am using it still. I put it away when I had it first. It was only after I left school that I began to make use of it. Here it is."

She drew from her pocket a small ivory-covered book, with her monogram upon it, and handed it Wickham.

"You may open it," she said, with a smile, seeing his hesitation, "I only make notes of my shopping expenses and things of that kind. It contains no secrets."

"What I hope is that it contains a clue to the place where your father stopped," responded the detective. "Ah, here we are!"

And he read aloud the inscription on the first page.

"VERONICA GRAHAM, from her loving Father,
August 21st, 188—, 20, Rue Blank,
Avenue Louise, Brussels."

With a triumphant smile Wickham copied the address.

"Things look a bit more hopeful now, Miss Graham. I'll make a visit to No. 20, Rue Blank, this very afternoon, and if I discover anything I'll come and report progress to you later on in the evening. I think I'm on the right track at last—if I don't find out all there is to be known it won't be my fault."

The detective did not let the grass grow under his feet. An hour or two later he was ringing the bell of a pretty white-shuttered house in one of the numerous streets leading from the Avenue Louise, on the door of which was a small brass plate bearing the name,—

"Mrs. Belton!"

In his best French—which, it must be confessed, was very bad—he asked for Madam Belton, and was led across the paved courtyard on which the big door opened to a smaller door on the left, and then into a fair-sized room with a parquet floor—rendered dangerously slippery by beeswax. A few rugs lay on the floor, a stove occupied one side of the room, a couch and some chairs were ranged against the wall.

The apartment looked bare and comfortable in spite of its gilded walls and painted ceiling.

Before long Mrs. Belton entered—a small, fat, vivacious-looking Belgian, who had married an English husband, spent some years in London, and prided herself on her excellent English, which was, however, not quite so good as she fancied.

Wickham had already made sundry inquiries about her, and had found out that she was in the habit of taking boarders, and was supposed to have made a fair little fortune by so doing.

Was monsieur a stranger in Bruxelles? Did he contemplate a long stay? Was it for the purpose of learning the language he had come? Who had been so kind as to recommend him to her? All these questions madam poured forth very volubly without giving him time to answer.

Wickham waited with stolid British patience until she finished; then he said,—

"No, madam, I'm not come to study the lan-

guage—it's a very nice language, no doubt; but I'm not an ambitious sort of man, and my own is quite good enough for me. I'll speak it now if you don't object."

"With the most pleasure of the world, monsieur," madam responded, though she looked a trifle disappointed all the same.

She was short of boarders just now, and this Englishman would have been welcome to her "pension."

"I want to speak about a gentleman and lady who were staying here some years ago—a Mr. and Mrs. Caleb Graham. Do you remember them?"

Madam threw up her hands with a dramatic gesture.

"But, yes! Very well indeed. Mr. Graham was a charming man—altogether delightful. But madam," here followed an expressive shrug, showing that Mrs. Caleb Graham had somehow failed to commend herself to Mrs. Belton.

"There was a third to the party," added Mrs. Belton, who, once set off, was inclined to be very loquacious—"a Mr. Dudley Maddox. He was always making experiments. I feared the house would be blown up, and I wished him to leave. But madam would not have it—she was very fond of the young man"—here the speaker looked at Wickham out of the corner of her eye. "I approved not of her behaviour. She did neglect her husband, and the poor man was sick—sick unto death. Often have I gone in and talked to him while he lay on the couch, and his wife was running about in the company of her cousin. He did speak always of the same thing—his daughter, who was at school in England. He begged she might be sent for; but no! madam would not have it, she would let her husband die without seeing the *petite fille*. I would have sent for her myself but it was not my affair, and, as monsieur knows, it is a risk to mix oneself with the business of other people."

"Exactly!" Wickham nodded approval of this sentiment. "So Mr. Graham was very ill while he was here?"

"So ill that the doctor said he could not possibly live one week; and yet his wife would have him go to England! I remonstrate, the doctor remonstrate—her husband beg her to let him die in peace—but no! Go he must, and go he did."

"To England?"

"Yes, and when the weather made so hot that even people in health find it hard to keep well. It was in September—the early part of September, that they go, or the end of August. I forget which, but I easily find out from my diary. A diary is a useful thing—very useful, I find."

Wickham recalled to mind that Vera's last letter from her father was in August—then came the gap, and afterwards the vague allusion in the tone of the epistles that had distressed her so much. He drew his chair a little nearer that of the widow, and assumed a confidential attitude.

"I see I am speaking to a clever woman, and one whose judgment is to be trusted," he said, diplomatically. "Now, I want to know your opinion of Mr. Graham—was he a man who seemed likely to commit a crime?"

"A crime—he! It would have been impossible. He was kind, he was true, and he was the soul of honour. I know it. Once I chanced to overhear a dispute between him and his wife—she had been doing something that he disapproved, and he was remonstrating. She said it was only 'sharp practice' she had been guilty of, but he said it was dishonourable, and he would rather die than stain his honour. Then she laughed and mocked him."

"Were they well off?"

"I think not—at the last. She was extravagant; she bought fine dresses and jewels and chignons, and went to theatres and amusements while he stayed at home. And sometimes she reproached him for having no more money to give her. When they left she was in debt—but not to me. She and I part not good friends. I tell her she ought to have shame for dragging a dying man across the Channel, and she tell me to mind my own business."

"But he was not dying—he lived many years after he left your house."

Mrs. Belton pursed up her lips, and nodded her head emphatically.

"So she say—but I believe it not! I have seen death often enough to know it, and there was death on his face when he wish me good-bye. If he recovered, there was a miracle worked, and, as monsieur knows, these are not the days of miracles."

Her tone and manner were full of significance. Wickham saw there was some underlying thought in her mind.

"It seems to me you ought to be a detective, madam—you are cleverer than any I have ever met!" he exclaimed, in a burst of enthusiasm, which evidently gratified her. "I may as well confess to you that I too have had suspicion of Mrs. Caleb Graham, but I could never quite hit the right nail on the head. Why, if her husband died, should she want to conceal the fact?"

Mrs. Belton bent forward until her face was within a few inches of his own, and spoke in a whisper,—

"Mr. Graham had a pension—it ceased at his death!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

A COMMERCIAL CRISIS.

VERA sat in the hotel sitting-room awaiting the return of Wickham, who had promised to let her know the result of his interview with Mrs. Belton. The young girl was a good deal excited—so much so that she found it impossible either to work or read. Suppose the detective's suspicions were true, and the old man at the Grange had not been her father after all! In that case the barrier between herself and Maurice would be removed—there would be no reason why they should not marry each other!

She got up from her seat and began to pace the room, while she tried her best to curb her restless impatience. Oh, how slowly the minutes dragged—when would the man come back! Her life of late had been so calm and monotonous that she was quite unprepared for this new element of doubt, and try how she would she could not control the wild hope that Wickham's suggestion had fanned into existence.

In the midst of her meditation the door was suddenly burst open, and Mabel rushed in, white and trembling.

"Oh, Vera, come to papa! He is in his room, in a fit, I think. I have never seen him like it before, and I don't know what to do. Come at once, I'm afraid he is dying."

Vera followed her into the adjoining apartment, and as her eyes fell on Mr. Butler's figure, which was lying on the ground, she was much inclined to echo poor Mabel's fear.

His face was purple, his breath came in short, stertorous gasps, his hands were clenched, a slight froth had risen to his lips.

In one of his clenched hands was a letter, which he had apparently been in the act of reading, when he was stricken down.

"Have you sent for a doctor?" asked Vera, kneeling down by his side, and unloosening his collar and necktie.

Mabel confessed she had not—she had been so frightened that this most obvious duty had not occurred to her.

Luckily an English doctor lived close at hand, and in a few minutes he arrived.

He was a short, dark man, with brusque manners, and a sharp voice, but there was an air of cleverness and authority about him that inspired both respect and obedience, and in less than half an hour the patient showed the good effects of his treatment.

Oddly enough, his first question was to ask for the letter that had been in his hand.

"It is here, dear pater," Mabel answered, holding it up as she spoke.

"Has anyone read it?"

"No. We have been too much taken up with you to think of anything else."

He seemed relieved, and turned to the doctor.

"I am anxious to leave for England to-night. Do you think I shall be able to do so?"

"Certainly not. It is quite out of the question."

The answer was accompanied by a very decided shake of the head, whereupon Mr. Butler groaned audibly.

"But I have business to arrange of the most important nature. My presence is absolutely necessary," he urged. "Heaven only knows what may happen at my office in London if I am not on the spot."

"If you remain perfectly quiet, and keep yourself free from excitement, you may be able to travel in a few days, but that entirely depends on the sort of night you have," was the inexorable reply, and Mr. Butler had to resign himself to the inevitable.

He lay still for some moments as if lost in thought; then he raised himself on his pillows, and addressed himself to Vera.

"Will you undertake a journey to London for me, Miss Graham?"

"Certainly," she responded, unhesitatingly. "I will do anything I can for you, Mr. Butler."

"Then send Mabel and the others out of the room. I must talk business with you—yes, in spite of the doctor's orders. It's all very well for him to tell me to keep myself free from excitement, but that's an impossibility, until I have arranged for something definite to be done."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and left the room, promising to send a soothing draught as soon as he got home.

Mabel followed him, to ask certain questions relative to her father's condition, and Vera and the old gentleman were left alone together.

His first words were startling enough.

"Miss Graham, I am a ruined man! This letter which I received only just before my seizure, was to tell me that my manager, in whom I placed the most entire confidence, has taken advantage of my absence to embark in all sorts of gambling speculations on the Stock Exchange."

"These have turned out disastrously, and now he has levanted, and it is discovered that it was with the firm's money that he was speculating. If I could only be on the spot it is possible I might manage to tide over the crisis—but I fear not!" he added, with a groan of despair; "things seem too bad for much to be done."

Naturally enough, Vera was considerably shocked by this revelation, but her first idea was that it should be kept from Mabel as long as possible, and in this Mr. Butler quite concurred.

"Anyhow, she'll know it all too soon, poor child," he muttered. "She is a good girl, and would do anything in the world for me, but she does not understand business, and I dare not entrust her with the mission that I am going to place in your hands. It is a delicate one, I confess, and you may not find it altogether pleasant."

"I shall not mind that," Vera replied earnestly. "I am only too glad to have the chance of repaying, in whatever fashion, the manifold kindness I have received from you and Mabel."

Mr. Butler proceeded to explain what she was to do.

First of all she must pay a visit to Lombard-street, and see the head clerk there; then she must go to a City merchant named Parsons, and lay the state of the case before him.

"We have been friends all our lives, he and I," added the old gentleman, "and I have helped him over many a tight place. It's his turn to help me now. If I can only get ten thousand pounds I shall be able to tide matters over, and save my reputation. What I want you to do is to ask Parsons to advance this sum to me—he is rich and he can do it without inconvenience if he will. He is supposed to be rather fond of his money, I know, but surely he won't refuse me when he knows how much depends on his decision. When he gives you the cheque you must go yourself and pay it into the bank and then go back to Lombard-street."

Here followed sundry directions, which, though of great importance to the stability of the firm of Butler & Co., have little to do with this story, and can therefore be omitted.

Vera listened very attentively and jotted down certain notes in her pocket-book. She possessed a remarkably clear head, and some aptitude for business, and to Mr. Butler's great relief showed

herself perfectly competent to undertake the task he set her.

As so much depended on the speed with which it was despatched Vera decided to start that very moment, and so catch the evening mail boat across the Channel.

By doing this she would miss Wickham's account of what had passed between him and Mrs. Belton; but that could wait until her return—it was secondary in importance to this pressing need.

So directly afterwards she found herself in a cab, being whirled along the boulevards to the station, where she was only just in time to take her ticket and catch the train.

Of the details of the journey it is unnecessary to speak. The crossing was somewhat rough, certainly; but Vera was a good sailor, and enjoyed it rather than otherwise.

Naturally she was very anxious regarding the success of her mission; it meant so much to Mr. Butler and Mabel.

There was more than money at stake—there was the credit of a man who had always held his head up, and prided himself on the strictness of his probity—the honour of his name.

And these were now in Vera's charge.

Arrived in London she went to the hotel whose name Mr. Butler had given her, and then made her way to his office.

From the general appearance of its interior it was clear that things were very much at sixes and sevens.

The clerks, instead of attending to their usual business, were gathered together in groups discussing the situation—some looking anxious enough, as they thought of the probable loss of their situations.

She delivered her credentials to the chief clerk, who, although evidently surprised, seemed, on the whole, relieved at her appearance, and informed her that no change had taken place in the aspect of affairs since he wrote his letter.

He agreed that by the aid of ten thousand pounds in cash the firm might be saved, but unless such a sum were forthcoming it was doomed.

Then came the interview that Vera dreaded most with Mr. Parsons. This man was the father of the young fellow chosen by Mr. Butler as his daughter's future husband, and perhaps the remembrance of this had something to do with the tremor of fear with which Vera sought him.

From Brussels she had, before starting, despatched a telegram informing him of her intended arrival, thus he was prepared to receive her, and she was at once ushered into his presence.

He was a tall stout man, with grey hair and beard, and an imposing presence—a gentleman who evidently held very pronounced views as to his own importance.

He eyed the young girl with a quick comprehensive glance that took in every detail of her appearance, and then courteously bade her be seated.

Vera had a humiliating sense of ineffectiveness as she sat there under that cold keen gaze, giving the details of Mr. Butler's petition.

Her companion raised his bushy grey eyebrows as she named the amount of the required loan, and she instinctively knew from his expression that her mission was a failure.

"Ten thousand pounds is a large amount, and the security Mr. Butler offers is a very poor one," he observed incisively. "Of course it is possible that the sum might set the business on its legs again; but on the other hand it is by no means certain, and I cannot afford to run the risk."

Poor Vera's heart sank—as much at his tone as at the words themselves. But she was not going to give up so easily.

"Mr. Butler is honest itself—"

"I am quite aware of that. He would pay back the loan if he could! But it might be impossible for him to do so."

"And he trusted so entirely to your help—he said you were such friends."

Mr. Parsons winced at the unconscious reproach.

"So we have been in the past—so I hope we may be in the future. But this is a matter of business, not friendship; and between the two must

be drawn a strict line of demarcation. It is useless discussing it any longer. My mind is entirely made up. I cannot comply with Mr. Butler's request, so I need not detain you any longer, Miss a—Graham"—glancing at her card, which was on the table before him, and rising as an intimation that the conversation was at an end.

After this Vera had no alternative but to take her departure, which she did very miserably, as she knew Mr. Butler had counted confidently on the merchant's assistance, and his refusal to give it left him without a resource. What would he do when she told him?

Poor Vera almost felt as if she herself were in fault as she left the fine roomy office with its ponderous writing-table and plate-glass windows, and descended the stairs into the street.

At the door she paused, wondering whether she had better telegraph to Brussels for further instructions or go back to Lombard-street and consult the chief clerk there as to what there was left to do.

The sound of her own name spoken in accents of surprise made her look up, and she saw standing before her no less a person than Mabel's old lover—Clement Harcourt.

The coincidence struck her as singular, she was almost inclined to look upon it as a good omen, and her manner as she returned his greeting was extremely cordial, as indeed it would have been under any circumstances, for she really liked the young doctor very much, and sympathised deeply with poor Mabel's love story.

"Are you staying in London?" he asked.

"Yes; at the—Hotel."

"And—Mabel?"

"She is in Brussels with her father."

"Is she well?"

"Fairly well. She has been rather delicate lately."

His face clouded over. He was full of eager inquiries. What ailed her? what were her symptoms? had she consulted a doctor? It was clear that he was as deeply in love with her as ever.

"And how are you getting on, yourself?" she asked him, as he turned to walk with her.

"Very well indeed. You know that I have said good-bye to Wales, and set up for myself in Harley-street? It was rather an ambitious thing to do, but luckily it has answered very well, and I am making my way in my profession, though of course I haven't amassed a fortune yet."

"Fortunes, seem to me, more easily spent than made," she observed, with a sigh.

"You speak feelingly, Miss Graham. I hope you have not been losing money lately."

"I should have to get it before I could lose it," she replied, smiling; and then she decided to tell him the business that had brought her to London, and ask his advice as to her next proceedings.

He was clever and clear-sighted, and he might be able to suggest something; he would certainly do his best, if only for the sake of Mabel.

He listened attentively to her recital, and when she finished, said,—

"Do you know I am almost inclined to rejoice that the old gentleman finds himself in this dilemma! Perhaps it will be the means of bringing Mabel nearer to me."

"But think of poor Mr. Butler's distress—yes, and Mabel's own! It will kill him if he loses the credit of which he has always been so proud, and she will feel it very deeply too."

An expression of compunction crossed the young doctor's face.

"I ought not to have said what I did. It is a terrible thing for a man of Mr. Butler's age to find himself in such a position. Does he really think that ten thousand pounds will set him on his legs again?"

"He is sure of it, and his principal clerk says the same thing."

Harcourt did not speak for some moments. He seemed to be lost in thought. Vera watched him anxiously, and at last, unable to restrain her impatience, she said,—

"Do you see any means of his getting this sum?"

"I fancy I do; at least, it is a chance, and we can but try it. I will explain. A little while

ago I had a patient—a young girl—ill with diphtheria; she was an only child and the darling of her parents, who were very wealthy people. An operation was necessary, and in order to save the patient's life a tube had to be introduced into her throat, and the poison drawn through it.

"Of course it was a risky business—sucking the poison out, but I did it, and the girl recovered. The parents were profuse in their expressions of gratitude; they offered me all sorts of extravagant things, and seemed as if they would hesitate at nothing by way of acknowledgment. Now, if I were to go to them and say I had urgent need of ten thousand pounds I feel pretty certain they would lend it me on my own personal security, and more than that, they would not press for payment for two or three years. If at the end of that time Mr. Butler were not able to meet the liability I expect I could manage it myself. Yes, I'll try it!"

"It is very generous of you," Vera said; but he only laughed.

"I'm not so sure of the generosity. Don't you see that I am playing a game for high stakes—as represented by Mabel?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

THE midday sun was shining down with fierce strength on an arid plain in the great North American continent. As far as the eye could reach there was no sign of civilisation, no trace of human habitation. Great barren mountains hemmed it in, and in the distance still loftier ranges were visible, capped with snow. There was no vegetation, save indeed a few stunted bushes, and these were covered with a film of grey dust, which was partly composed of salt. Of a river, or fresh water there was no trace—and these were what a small party of horsemen who rode slowly across the desert were evidently in search of.

They looked weary and travel worn, their clothes bore signs of considerable wear and tear, their faces were bronzed to pretty well the colour of mahogany, although their soft felt hats were pulled low down over their brows. The two foremost ones, who were young men under thirty, and seemed to be in command of the party, rode alone, conversing now and again as they went.

"Rather a bad look out, isn't it, St. John?" said the elder of the two, whose name was Craven, and who had been Maurice's travelling companion since he left England.

"Oh, no," replied Maurice, cheerfully. "We have been in as great a strait as this before, and lost our bearings too. If we could only find a well, or water of any kind, I shouldn't mind."

"Ay, but there's the difficulty; so far as I can see there's no water to be had, and it's quite clear that our supplies won't last longer than today. We have been most careful of them, too. Well, a man can only die once."

"Don't talk of death, Craven! Why, good Heavens, man, you don't mean to say you are going to show the white feather!"

"Not a bit of it. Only we have been wandering round for four days without being able to find our track, and it seems to me just as likely we shall be another four days before we hit it. It's enough to make one feel rather despairing."

Maurice looked at him anxiously. This strain of despondency was so unlike his usual cheerfulness that he suspected there must be something wrong with the young man. His glance did not tend to reassure him. Craven was pale and somewhat wild-eyed, while his manners and expression betrayed a listlessness usually quite foreign to them. It was easy to see the hardships of the last few days—the insufficient rations, and scanty supplies of water had left their mark on him. Suppose he were to break down—out there in the dreary salt plain, with no doctor, and no remedies at hand!

"Cheer up, old fellow!" he said, as gallily as he could—though his own spirits were far enough

removed from gaiety. "It's always darkest before the dawn, you know."

"But is the dawn coming? I doubt it." He rode on in silence for a few minutes, Maurice meanwhile keeping a sharp look out around; then he drew his horse rather nearer, and leaned across his saddle. "If anything should happen to me, old chap, and you should get back to England safe and sound, will you take a message for me?"

"Of course I will. Who is it?"

"A woman—that goes without saying." He laughed rather bitterly. "You know the lady, Geraldine Chandos. Tell her I died with her name on my lips. Perhaps that'll convince her that my love was too good to be thrown away after all."

Maurice looked surprised—and indeed he felt so, for he had had no idea that love passages had taken place between these two.

"Geraldine Chandos?" he repeated. "Do you mean my Aunt, Lady Evermond's niece?"

"Certainly—whom else should I mean? Are you astonished that I am in love with her?"

"I think I am—a little."

"And yet it ought to seem a natural enough thing to you that any man should lose his heart to her!"

Craven spoke with such significance that his companion turned once more to look at him, inquiringly.

"I was never an admirer of Miss Chandos," he added, after a slight pause.

"Weren't you? All the same, it was looked upon as a settled thing that you would marry her."

"Was it—by whom?"

"Your uncle and aunt—Lord and Lady Evermond, and by the young lady herself."

Maurice grew red beneath his tan.

"You have surely made a mistake."

"I wish to Heaven I had!" breathed the other, fervently. "I will make a clean breast of it to you, St. John. I have been in love with Geraldine Chandos for two years; I proposed to her, and she refused me, giving me to understand at the same time, that her affections were otherwise engaged. Perhaps I oughtn't to mention this, but I don't suppose it matters—in all likelihood we shall neither of us ever see her again. It was in despair at her refusal that I undertook this journey with you."

Maurice sat very still in his saddle, gazing straight before him at the misty outline of the hills on the horizon.

They were now passing through a narrow defile between two mountains, which seemed to have suffered lately from some volcanic disturbance.

Great boulders strewed their path, and above them still huger ones seemed to balance tremulously over their heads ready to be displaced by the slightest movement.

"Look here, Craven; you have been frank with me, I'll be equally frank with you," he said, abruptly. "So far from being a lover of Miss Chandos I have fully made up my mind never to marry. I was engaged to a girl whom I loved with all my heart and soul. Fate stepped in and divided us. It is impossible that any other woman can take her place, and I shall be true to her memory as long as I live."

As he ceased speaking a very extraordinary thing happened. Across the gorge came the whimper of a human voice, very clear and distinct, and the words it said were,—

"Vera Graham—Vera Graham."

Maurice started so violently that his horse, resenting the sudden pull at the reins, reared high in the air and backed so furiously that the young man had much ado to keep his seat.

At the same moment one of the boulders fell from above and crashed down on the path immediately in front of him. If he had been half a yard nearer his doom would have been sealed.

"Quick, quick!" cried Craven, who was some little distance in advance. "Let us get out of this place as soon as we can. There is treachery about."

He put spurs to his horse, and galloped ahead, followed by Maurice, who was considerably startled, if not alarmed, by this strange occurrence. Once beyond the limits of the defile they drew

rein, and looked back, with a view of ascertaining the cause of it.

Nothing was visible except a bear, one of the grizzly ones occasionally seen in those regions, trotting off with lumbering swiftness, startled at the reverberation of the falling rock, whose echoes had not even yet died away.

"Could it have been that animal that loosened the boulder?" queried Maurice of his companion, but with a certain amount of incredulity.

"I should say not. At any rate it couldn't have been the bear that spoke."

"Ah, then you heard it too? I was beginning to think it must have been my fancy."

"Precious little fancy! The words were as clear as daylight. By the way, who is Vera Graham?"

"The girl I was speaking to you about."

Craven gave vent to a long low whistle.

"By George, talk of coincidences! But this must be something more than a coincidence. There must be—"

He was interrupted in a sufficiently impressive manner. A bullet whizzed through the air, evidently aimed at Maurice. He swerved to one side, with the result that it only grazed his cheek. The blood, however, burst from the wound, and for the moment Craven feared it might be a mortal one.

In a second he was off his horse, and by his friend's side.

"All right, old fellow," Maurice said, reassuringly, while he folded his handkerchief into a pad to staunch the blood. "It's nothing much, only a flesh wound."

"That's not the fault of the man that fired the revolver, then," Craven responded, grimly. "It was aimed deliberately at you, I should say, with the intention of letting daylight through you. There must be some murderous hound stalking up there among the rocks. You stay here, while I and the others go and hunt him out."

But Maurice was not likely to be behind hand in such a chase, and after tethering his horse he followed the rest up the incline and began to search amongst the roughly piled up rocks that were likely to form a very efficient hiding-place for his assailant.

For some time their efforts were met by complete failure; but presently the sound of a human voice came echoing down the mountains, and looking up they beheld the figure of a man waving a tattered old hat as if in derision. He was some distance above them, and sprang from rock to rock with the agility of a born mountaineer; but at this distance it was impossible to recognise his features, or indeed his figure.

Craven, by way of answering his challenge, let fly a bullet, but its only effect was to call forth a peal of scornful laughter, and at the same time the man disappeared from view.

"Is it worth while following, think you?" asked Craven, addressing himself to Maurice, who, however, shook his head.

"I think not. He evidently knows the place well, and we should have a very poor chance of catching him up. Besides, we shall be out in the open presently, and then there'll be no further risk of revolver shots from him."

"Have you any idea as to his identity?"

"Not the slightest."

"It would almost seem as if he might be a personal enemy of your own."

"Yes, his actions seem to point to that conclusion; but I really did not know that I had an enemy in the world. Hullo! what have we here?"

He was looking on the ground as he spoke, where an ominous crimson had stained the rock. Craven bent down to examine it.

"Fresh blood," he observed, "and a trail of spots. Let us follow it."

They did so, keeping their revolvers ready, for in these wild regions it was necessary to be always on the alert for possible foes. The spots of blood grew less frequent, but they still appeared at intervals for some distance, until the searchers were faced by an upright wall of rock, in front of which a few bushes were growing. Craven pushed his way behind these, and then gave vent to a little cry of triumph.

"It's a cave; I thought so! Now look out for adventures."

Maurice put his hand on his friend's shoulder to draw him back.

"Wait a minute. Don't venture in without a lantern. We may find ourselves in a lair of grizzlies, and that wouldn't be pleasant."

Craven waited impatiently until a torch was procured. All his former depression seemed to have deserted him, perhaps because of the exciting events of the last half-hour which had broken the former monotony of the journey, or perhaps—and this is more likely—because he no longer feared Maurice's rivalry with Geraldine Chanda.

Very cautiously the little party advanced, the flaming torch held high above the head of the foremost one, and casting dense shadows on the rocky walls and floor.

The cave was, indeed, a sort of natural gallery, with many twists and turns in it; with a lofty roof, from which curious stalactites hung pendant and glistening, looking like so many serpents twisted into strange contortions, which seemed to move in the shifting shadows of the torch.

The air was damp and cold and vault-like, and made the explorers shiver. Once, indeed, Maurice, who felt himself in a sense responsible for the safety of the others, paused.

"Would it not be wiser to go back? Remember we are only four, and we know not the strength of the party we may have to face."

But Craven would not hear of a retreat. The spirit of adventure was fired in his blood, and caution was out of the question.

"Hush!" he said, bending his head to listen, "I thought I heard something like a groan."

They all stood still and strained their ears to catch the slightest echo that might break the silence.

For a few seconds all was quiet; then there came the distinct sound of a human voice moaning out as if in pain.

"Who is there?" cried Maurice, raising his voice.

There was no response, and the explorers pushed on, examining every hole and corner as they went. They were at least determined that nothing and no one should escape them.

It was Maurice who first spotted the occupant of the cavern—an old man, lying on some out branches in a little recess on the floor. He was apparently in pain, but the pain seemed less than the fright from which he had been suffering since he scented the approach of strangers.

"Thank Heaven you are white men!" he muttered, piously; "I was afraid you was Injuns. Now I shall be able to die in peace, I s'pose."

"Why, what has happened to you?" asked Maurice, kneeling down on the rocky floor in order to examine him. "Are you alone here?"

"I'm alone since my pardner took and left me. I'm dying of thirst, just dying of it."

His appearance was pitiable in the extreme.

He was an old man, over sixty, with a spare, sinewy frame which must, at one time, have possessed great strength. Now it was shrunken and gaunt. His cheeks were hollow, the skin falling into loose wrinkles about the bones, and the eyes gazing forth wildly from their deep sockets.

Evidently he must have suffered considerable hardships of late, in addition to a wound on the left side of his forehead.

"How did you get that?" Maurice asked, pointing to it, after a whispered consultation with Craven, which resulted in the latter going out to get their last treasured bottle of water.

"I fell down—lost my footing, and struck my forehead against a jagged piece of rock. It pretty nigh did for me at the time—that and the thirst. Happen you hav'n't got any water?" he added wistfully, and yet with a certain hopelessness that seemed to say he had little faith in the granting of his request.

His joy when a tot of the precious liquid was held to his lips was intense.

He drained it to the last drop with a fierce greed that seemed to be on guard lest it should, even yet, be snatched from him.

"I never thought as how a drink of water

would taste like *that*," he remarked, as Maurice took the empty cup from him.

As he spoke, he looked up into the young man's face, which was strongly illuminated by the flare of the lantern.

An expression of puzzled wonderment came in his eyes, and almost involuntarily he exclaimed,—

"Why it's Mr. St. John!"

Maurice was naturally amazed to hear his name spoken by a stranger under such circumstances; he looked at the old man again more intently than before, but failed to recognize him.

"Who are you?" he asked, with curiosity.

The man hesitated, as if uncertain whether he would do well to answer the question, his face, meanwhile, expressing a variety of emotions, fear being predominant.

"I said we should be tracked down even yet. I told him so, but he laffed and said I was in my dotage," he muttered, half to himself. "It's Providence—that's what it is."

Maurice, failing to understand the drift of these ramblings, put them down to delirium, and indeed, the old man's appearance was wild enough to justify the idea.

His eyes rolled, his features twitched; evidently he was very strongly agitated.

Suddenly he raised himself on his elbow, and peered round at the curious faces about him.

"Is there e'er a one of you as is summat of a doctor?" he asked. "My pardner, what's just left me, knew a sight about medicine, and such things, and he told me I was took for death. Is it true?"

There was an ominous silence.

None of the four men surrounding him could claim much medical skill, and yet all saw the sign manual of Death in that pallid face—it required no technical knowledge to discover that much.

In the pause that followed the old man read his answer. His head drooped forward on his breast, and he groaned. A minute later he looked up again.

"I'll make a clean breast of everything now. Dudley Maddox has gone and left me here to die—he's took the gold with him, too. But I'll be even with him yet! Mr. St. John, my name's James Thrupp, and I used to live at Graystoke Grange. I'm going to tell you who killed your brother Frank!"

(To be continued.)

STRAYED AWAY.

—10—

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DOWN AT PENGE.

PERCY FAULKLAND did not return to Germany so soon as he had promised. He had set the contract so well in hand that the work could continue in his absence for a time; so he stayed at Penge.

He was very much in the society of Miss Millard. The girl was beautiful, and beautiful girls had, perhaps, too much power over Percy's heart.

From the moment that he discarded Fanny he began to convince himself of her guilt, and try to think how he could best get rid of her. She was in his way.

"Fettered," he would say to himself—"chained for life—and to a faithless woman. How blindly men in their mad passion rush into their destiny, thinking only of the present joy, caring nothing for the future that may come!"

"Why should I regard her as an obstacle?" he went on, when the beauty of Miss Millard tempted him—when the pleased glow of her fair cheek, the soft light in her eye told him that her regard for him was deepening into tenderest feeling. "The girl is no more to me than as if she were dead. She will never urge her claim—never reveal the secret. She is nothing to me now."

The actual thought in his mind, the idea that

he dared not whisper or give shape to, was that he might marry Adelaide Millard, and the past would never be known.

The days wore on, and still he lingered at home, Fanny fading from his soul, the old love lessening, the new passion creeping in. He was skilled in the initiatory mysticism of courtship—the little signs and tokens by which men know they are welcome suitors—and he was a welcome suitor to Adelaide.

Mr. Millard gave good dinners, and Percy was always invited. The only son of the great Lambeth builder and contractor was too important a personage to be lost sight of by a man who sometimes stood in need of aid.

"It would be a good thing for Adelaide," Mr. Millard had said to his wife. "Vitey is risky—young Falkland is safe. Vitey has been in with me lately, and dropped heavily—lost more than he can get back in the next four years."

"Have you had any losses?" Mrs. Millard inquired. She had very little knowledge of business matters, and she took less interest in them.

Her husband showed his teeth in a grim smile. It was a saying of his that for a business man to confess a loss was to admit an enemy into the camp, and he added that next to being successful was to seem so.

"While you have money as you require it," he said—"while your household expenses and your milliners' bills—which, by the way, need not be so heavy—are paid, you had better not trouble yourself about my transactions. The thing is, we must give a dinner, set young Falkland and Vitey together, and see what can be done with them."

So the dinner was given, and Percy met Mr. Vitey. That gentleman was a middle-height man, of spare figure, keen, deep-set eyes, and the hard, cynic features of a man whose ruling passion had been making money.

He had mentioned Adelaide once or twice in a way that evinced his intentions. He had talked about an estate, a splendid family seat, which had fallen into his possession by the lapse of a mortgage he held on it, and said that he thought of settling down.

"And I want a young and beautiful creature," he said to Mr. Millard. "I have lived too long, and passed too many, to be satisfied with any but the best now."

"What would you settle upon her?" asked Millard.

"Ten thousand."

"You are thinking of my Adelaide," said Millard. "You may as well speak out."

"I am thinking of her. Do you think I shall have any chance?"

"You can try."

And then the matter dropped. It was a mere monetary transaction. Ten thousand pounds, of which he intended to be the trustee, would be very useful to Mr. Millard in his operations; so he informed Adelaide, with his customary brevity, that she must learn to look upon Mr. Vitey as her suitor.

Adelaide had to obey. She had a religious sense of duty. The school in which she had been trained was a good one, and she had been taught to sacrifice everything to the will of her parents. She was a coquette, fond of admiration, rich dressing, and luxury; but she was still the pure-hearted, gentle English girl, whose faults were but a thin veneer over the sweetness of her nature.

She was glad when Percy came, because there was a change. The younger Falkland helped her to a large extent out of her difficulty. His cool assurance, the nerve with which he did anything and everything enabled him to entirely set Mr. Vitey aside—in fact, for all the regard Percy paid to Mr. Vitey or his position, Mr. Vitey might as well have not existed.

Mr. Millard had instructed his wife to lead up the dinner table conversation, so that it should touch upon the matrimonial question. The lady did her mission well. She referred gracefully to a poor friend of hers who was so unhappy; the poor dear was very young—so was her husband.

"And I don't know what to think of marriages between young people," she added. "It often seems to me that a girl had better marry a steady, middle-aged man. Don't you think so?"

"I don't think so," said Percy, giving a glance to Adelaide, who was his *vis-a-vis*. "Men who marry late in life, and then choose a young girl, are either worn-out reprobates, or sordid-minded beings, who never have loved, and never can really love."

"Those are exceptional cases," suggested Mr. Vitey, to whom the remark had gone like a direct thrust.

"Granted," said Percy; "but I do not like exceptional things, especially in marriage, the rule is the safer. I never heard of a girl marrying an elderly man without I feel much regret. It is suggestive of throwing a sweet May blossom on the cold breast of winter, to let it wither."

Adelaide thanked him with a look. Mrs. Millard sipped her wine and coughed. Mr. Vitey took refuge in his curry, and looked red. Mr. Millard said he agreed with Percy.

"And very well expressed," he added, with a glance that showed he enjoyed the palpable hit at his friend, "eh, Vitey?"

"Ahem—yes. Only I am not sentimental, and I do not like comparisons."

"Similes," corrected Percy.

"Whichever you please, Mr. Falkland. But a young lady is no more like a sweet May blossom—sweet nonsense!—than a middle-aged man is like the cold breast of winter."

"Poetry and percentage never did agree," smiled Mr. Falkland. "If you question my reply, I must put it to the ladies, Mrs. Millard—and he made a very graceful little bow towards the lady,—“do you think Mr. Vitey was justified in taking exception?"

"No, Mr. Falkland. It was very pretty, and you were right."

"Thanks. And, Miss Millard, you?"

The final word and the look that accompanied it fully expressed the interrogative.

"I quite agree with Mr. Falkland."

"Then the verdict is against me," said Mr. Vitey, hiding his discomfiture under an assumption of good humour. He was a well-bred man; a City gentleman of good position and integrity—commercial integrity—and he could bear himself with grace. "I must keep to my percentage and the winter, leaving the sweet May blossoms and the poetry to Mr. Falkland."

Adelaide sung to them after dinner! Percy hung enraptured over the piano. Mr. Vitey yawned at the song, but took a lively interest in the singer. The older man admired the woman only, the younger was charmed, as it were, with the artist apart from herself.

She left the piano when fatigued, or rather because Percy, anxious to get her out of Mr. Vitey's way, glanced at the garden and suggested a ramble.

"Yes," said Mr. Vitey; "and Miss Millard will do me the honour."

"Sit down and have a cigar with me," said Mr. Millard, with a laugh; "leave the young people to themselves. You will find my old Madeira better than star-gazing."

The City gentleman sat down again. He gazed very angrily at his friend. There is something ludicrous in an elderly man's rivalry, unless he can conquer by the mere force of weight of years and dignity of character.

Percy led Miss Millard into the garden. She put on a thin white gauze silk scarf, a pretty feature of drapery that made the beauty of her full white shoulders more remarkable, and deepened without hiding their baby-like dimples.

"Yes, you are very beautiful," said Percy, unconsciously uttering his thought.

"Pardon me, Miss Millard."

"It is the sort of sin one can pardon easily"—she smiled—"for you said it so sincerely."

"It came from my heart. Is it true—I have heard it from those cubes—he meant her brothers, and he spoke of them with undisguised contempt—that Mr. Vitey was ever in any way looked upon as a possible suitor for you?"

She sighed.

"It is true."

"What a sacrifice it would be!" he said.

"Surely you do not care for him?"

"Not an atom. I have a cold shiver at the mere idea."

They had reached the end of the garden. There was a door that opened into a lane shut in by pretty hedgerows.

Percy pushed the door open. The lane was about two feet below the level of the garden, and Percy jumped down lightly.

"Will you come," he said, facing her and opening his arms, "or are you afraid?"

"Stand further back, and see. But mind you catch me."

The tiny satin slipper and delicate ankle twinkled for a moment on his sight as she leaped. She had much girlish grace and freedom, and liked anything slightly adventurous.

He caught her. His arms closed, and crushed her in a momentary embrace. He would have kissed the lovely face so near his own, but he dared not, though he was very daring.

Adelaide did not move. A pained expression came into her face, and she limped a step.

"What have you done?" he said, anxiously.

"Sprained my ankle."

The garden door had closed; it had a lock that shut of itself. Percy shattered it though in a moment, and picking her up in his arms, took her in. The fair arms twined involuntarily round his neck. She had faintly.

"My darling!" said Percy—and he rained kisses on the pallid face—"I am sorry—very sorry!"

No response. Only a faint colour stole into her cheeks, and the soft arms twined more heavily. He bore her into the drawing-room, and laid her on the couch.

"Get out of the way," he said, to Mr. Vitey, who came forward in much alarm. "Run for a doctor—Miss Millard has broken her ankle, I fear."

"Even then you need not carry your sympathy so far," said Mr. Vitey, angrily, for Percy, forgetting everything but his regret at the beautiful creature in pain, had knelt by her side, pillowed her head on his shoulder, and pressed his lips to hers. He might have done the same to a sick child, and with the same feeling, but Mr. Vitey did not like it.

"Go to the deuce!" said Percy. He did not use much ceremony when he felt deeply. "What is it to you?"

Mr. Vitey said it was remarkably strange conduct, but Mr. Millard hurried him out of the room. The latter gentleman was quite satisfied with the turn events were taking, and he thought the accident a rather fortunate occurrence.

The doctor was sent for, and he came. Percy went out reluctantly while the patient was attended to. In the hall the strong hand of Mr. Millard fell upon his shoulder.

"What am I to understand?" said Adelaide's father. "I may be permitted to express some surprise, as I have heard no declaration."

Percy felt that he had gone too far to retract. He made up his mind Miss Millard should be his at any risk.

"That I love your daughter," he said, in the haughty way peculiar to him when he was questioned. "If you thought my conduct strange you must consider the circumstances."

Mr. Millard held out his hand. He said:

"If Adelaide loves you, and I think she does—"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, then," smiled the other, "she shall be yours, if with your father's sanction."

They shook hands upon it.

Percy's head swam as he returned to the drawing-room. He meditated nothing less than a crime; but passion would not let him think of it.

Adelaide was sitting up when he entered. Her mother had told her what had happened. Adelaide had a dim sense of it herself. The faintness of pain merely deprives the sufferer of consciousness—the body swoons—the mind is keenly alive to what is said or done.

Mr. Vitey had left the house in high dudgeon, and there was an end of him. He said very bad

things about that dinner, and was not quite fair in his description of Percy. Whenever anyone mentioned Penge to him he sneered, and said that no gentleman or man of sense would live in such a place. As for the people there—bah!

Percy placed a chair by Adelaide's side, and her little delicate hand dropped ably into his.

"Is it serious?" he said, in his gentlest tone.

"Not very. I shall be out in a day or two."

"And till then I shall be in torture. I cannot forgive myself." Then he dropped his tone lower still. "I have spoken to your father, Adelaide."

"Yes!"

The simple word was full of shy inquiry, and the sweet eyes drooped.

"He consents. Are you glad?"

Adela gave him her other hand. He turned the averted face towards him, and touched her forehead with his lips. At the moment he did so came a memory that smote him sharper than a knife.

"If ever I forget you, or love another, or cease to love you," it said, "may Heaven deal with me as I deserve!"

They were his own words—the words that in one of his moments of passion he had spoken to Fanny when she was Fanny West.

But he looked at Adelaide.

"Now," he asked himself in agony, "can I give up this beautiful girl who loves me so?"

"Percy," she said—it was the first time she had spoken his name, and it sounded strangely sweet—"You have some troubles."

"None, dearest, except your pain."

"That will soon be over. Besides, you can come and sit with me till I am able to go out."

"Mine!" he said, silently. "You shall be mine, if I risk ruin—perdition!"

The man was fated. His passion always had been stronger than his judgment.

He went every day to see Miss Millard. He read to her, played and sang for her, and she unconsciously drew his love from Fanny to herself. If he ever thought of his poor neglected wife it was with bitterness.

At Millard's house he was received as Adela's accepted suitor. The "cubs," as he was pleased to designate the Millards junior, almost fawned upon him, and he lent them loose sovereigns and bank-notes, and they were at his feet. They spoke of him as "a good lot, you know; a proper kind of fellow for a fellow to know; you know."

And Percy, quenching reproachful memory, tried to be happy; but the phantoms of the past would haunt him. The memory of that loving trustful face that he had last seen stamped with such bitter agony.

It came once between him and his unholy dream of happiness. He took Miss Millard to the St. James's Theatre, and all the way from Penge he talked to her with the worship that came upon him when they were alone together, and when the carriage stopped, the first person on whom his eyes fell was Fanny.

He muttered something in an undertone. Fanny saw her husband hand a beautiful young lady from the brougham, and she advanced towards him with a little cry; but his stern, repressive glance silenced and drove her back.

They went in—the fair vision, with its jewels and bouquet, the tiny hand on Percy's arm, and his form bent down upon her in tenderness. They left her standing there, desolate, forsaken—more than desolate; for at sight of him uprose the old love, and filled her heart with the bitterness of despair.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN THE THEATRE.

The poor girl stood out there in the night while carriage after carriage drew up to the theatre.

Percy and the lady had disappeared through the wide doors at the end of the entrance hall. He had not even cast a glance behind him.

Fanny's eye fell upon the programme—it was

The Rivals and The Wife's Secret. It was singularly suggestive to her.

Perhaps that beautiful fair lady on Percy's arm was her rival, and surely the wife's secret was her own, for she had seen her husband, and dared not speak to him.

The brougham that had brought them there had turned round and was slowly passing her, when Fanny, acting on a sudden impulse, made a signal to the coachman. He pulled up to the kerb stone.

"Who was that gentleman?" she asked, looking at the man with the plaintive mystery of her sweet face—the mystery that had grown of the keeping of her sad secret, and the plaintiveness that had come to her because of long and patient suffering. The man was touched by the expression.

"Mr. Falkland, miss."

Fanny, with her girlish, graceful figure and simple elegance of dress, did not look like a wife, and so he called her "miss."

"And the lady—is she Mrs. Falkland?"

Her heart heaved while she asked the question.

"No, not yet. She's Miss Millard; but they're going to be married soon."

She thanked the man with a gesture, and turned away with a shivering sigh.

"Not yet; but they're going to be married soon!"

Had not pride sustained her she would have reeled and fallen under the carriage wheel.

"So soon," she thought, "to be so merciless—to forget me so entirely. Oh, Percy! Percy! have you no care for our child?"

She went on like one in a dream—walked blindly and with a white dazed look upon her countenance that startled the passers-by.

She walked to the end of the street and then turned back, filled with a despairing longing to look upon Percy once more.

There is a certain calmness in deep agony; the mind when tortured finds a strength in torture.

Fanny was quite collected when she went to the pay box of the pit, and tendered the price for admission.

She was conscious that her dress would not do for the boxes, and she wanted to see Percy while herself unseen.

The pit was nearly full, but she found a place down the side near the stalls. Her face was but one amongst many hundred faces, and it was not likely to fall under Percy's observation.

She stood at the end of a seat, with her hand on its back, and she peered round in search.

There they were, almost directly opposite, in the second box over the stage—Miss Millard with her gloved hand on the velvet ledge of the box, her fan in quiet play, and Percy, handsome and quite self-possessed, bending over her with the tender look Fanny knew so well.

The orchestra, always good at the St. James's, was playing brilliantly; but to Fanny the notes of music were so many sounds without meaning. The house was crowded with West-end fashion, rank, and beauty, but to Fanny there was nothing but a hazy sea of features and colour.

Her whole soul was centred in her gaze, and her gaze was fixed upon that box. She could see nothing else.

Miss Millard handed Percy her lorgnette. She had swept the audience carelessly, and been interested by the earnest gaze of her unconscious rival.

"Look at that young person in the pit," Miss Millard said. "I think it is the same one we saw at the doors. Is she not pretty?"

Percy took the opera glass, and followed the direction of Miss Millard's gaze. His hand trembled for a moment. There was some remorse in his emotion, but there was more anger.

"Here," he said, silently. "What does she mean? To claim me, perhaps—ahame me before Adelaide. If she does," he added, between his teeth, "I will disown her!"

"Don't you think her pretty?" said Miss Millard, with the careless interest of a lady who could afford to admire the beauty of one beneath her. "And she seems quite alone."

Percy closed the glass. The last words smote him.

"Yes," he said, quietly; "pretty in her style."

"Is it the fashion of that class of persons to visit a theatre alone?"

"I believe so," he smiled. "They see no harm in it."

Percy turned his gaze upon the stage then. Strangely enough the hero of Sheridan's comedy was named Falkland, and he was an unreasonably jealous man.

Percy became interested, as it were, in the delineation of his own character on the stage.

He was very pale—he could not be quite at ease while Fanny was there. She stayed till the drop scene fell on the second act, and then the white, anguished face disappeared. The sorrowful gleam of her dark eyes haunted him long after she was gone.

As yet sufficient time had not elapsed for him to be hardened against the woman he had loved. Think of her as he would, put the very worst construction on her conduct, and still there were extenuating circumstances. Young and beautiful, and placed in an equivocal position, temptation was sure to be thrown in her way.

He was glad when she was gone; yet his heart went after her with a slight longing and some remorse. And he felt some remorse, too, when he looked at Adelaide; she loved him, and had such faith in him. Yet he tried to justify himself, did justify himself with such miserable sophistry as he could bring to his aid. It was the cowardly, self-justification of a selfish man.

Mr. Percy Falkland had some courage; but it was not the manly courage of the Christian. He had no moral bravery; he was simply one of the many, as selfish in his own gratification, as weak in the hour of temptation.

He knew the nature of the sin he was committing in teaching Miss Millard to love him, yet he persisted, in spite of the peril to her. He felt that Fanny had wronged him, and he was ready to sacrifice Adelaide on the altar of his wrong.

"Our secret is safe," he said to himself for the hundredth time; "she will never interfere, whatever happens."

That reflection always consoled him; the unkind, cruel faith he had in the poor girl's religious observance of her oath promised him immunity from the sin he contemplated.

They left at the termination of *The Rivals*. Penge was too long a journey to be performed in the late night air, and Percy was very careful of his companion. He half expected to see Fanny waiting for them outside, but she was not there. She had taken her weary soul home to her parents and her child.

Neither old Bill West nor his wife ever knew what had happened. Fanny kept her sorrow to herself. They saw that she was very pale, and she explained by saying she was tired.

Fanny went to bed, and lay there, white and tearless, with baby on her breast. She could not weep—her grief was too bitter for that.

She would have yielded passively to his decree of banishment; but her instinct told her that duty forbade her silence should Percy attempt to carry out his design and lead Miss Millard to the altar. And then Fanny asked herself how was she to prevent it?

By the terms of her own voluntary vow she would have to deny their marriage, even were she set face to face with Adelaide. She dared produce no proof, and Percy would denounce her as an impostor. And then her interference would so anger him that she was sure he would carry out his threat of having her divorced.

Fanny shrank from that thought. She shivered at the cold and stern determination that could take advantage of the necessarily matter-of-fact legal machinery of the day and put aside the woman who had loved him with more than love. He would do it. He was a man of fixed resolution, and what he promised he would carry out to the bitter end.

The engagement between Percy and Miss Millard was a source of gratification to the parents.

Falkland the elder saw in it a certain ending

of his son's unwise and unworthy passion, as he considered it.

Mr. Millard was aware of the value such a union would be to him. He needed capital at times, and, what was better for his purpose, a good credit.

He was managing director of a large loan, discount, and banking business—a company limited as to capital, unlimited as to trade.

The families became more intimate than ever after that evening when Adelaide sprained her ankle.

The two elder gentlemen went up to town together in the morning, and returned in the afternoon in the same brougham, chatting pleasantly about the event that was possible.

"My son Percy is a man of business," said Mr. Falkland. "He stood the test worthily when it came to the point, and has been the making of that contract. He will have to return soon."

"For long!"

"A year or so."

Millard looked grave.

"That is a pity," he said. "You know the proverb, Falkland, 'There's many a slip'—"

"Yes, I have thought of that. I don't know whether it would not be a good thing to have it over at once. He cannot remain more than another month. I do not see why they should not go together; a wife is the best guardian a young gentleman can have. Percy has been wild."

"Nothing serious, I suppose?"

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Falkland—the ruin of a poor man's child or so was nothing very serious in his eyes—the usual indiscretions. I sent him out of the way on account of one of them."

Millard looked inquiringly.

"I do not know whether it is customary or necessary to enter into such matters," Falkland observed; "but you can judge best whether it would be wise to tell Adelaide about it."

And he related to the best of his thinking and his knowledge what had passed between Percy and old Bill West's daughter.

Mr. Millard was apparently in no way shocked. He was a strict moralist at home; he would have punished—that is to say, got damages to the fullest extent against anyone who had wronged a child of his; but the child of another man was another matter altogether.

"I daresay the girl was as much to blame," he said. "And Adelaide need not know anything about it. A sensible girl does not care to inquire into her husband's bachelor life, and Adela has been well trained."

Mr. Millard was a respectable citizen, an irreproachable ratepayer, a good husband and father, and he attended church every Sunday morning, and that was his morality.

So it was settled the marriage should be hurried on, and, conditional on Adela consenting, Percy would take her to Germany with him as his wife within a month.

(To be continued.)

The best tea in Japan is raised in districts where snow often falls to the eaves of the houses. Many plants will survive under such snow that are not hardy even in the Southern States. By the same rule some varieties of Japanese lilies will survive Vermont winters that are not hardy in Missouri.

The life of wire rope on cable railways or for power transmission of any kind is greatly prolonged by lubrication. Careful experiments show that an unlubricated rope broke at sixteen thousand bends over a pulley, while a lubricated rope endured thirty-eight thousand bends over the same pulley.

ALTHOUGH swimming comes naturally to most of the lower animals it is a universal law with man that the power of swimming has to be acquired. At the same time there is no race in all the world to which the art is unknown; and in many barbarous countries it is more diffused and carried to greater perfection than among civilized people.

THE IMPULSE OF A MOMENT.

—101—

(Continued from page 345.)

"You must not marry Frank Mackinder," it ran; "such a union is impossible. If you doubt the necessity for this warning ask him to explain how Duke Favert came by his death."

Maisie kept her eyes anxiously fixed on her father's face.

"What does it mean?" she asked tremulously.

"An attack of hysteria most probably," Mr. Daynham replied, coolly; "but certainly nothing that need cause you any distress. The implication of course is that your sweetheart had a hand in Duke's death, and if that were so I must admit that the world owes him a debt of gratitude. However, if you like, you can enclose this precious epistle in your next letter, and ask him for an explanation; no doubt it will be forthcoming readily enough. Now, don't bother your head about it any more."

Maisie was about to make a reply, when a servant brought Frank's telegram, stating that he was on his way to Italy.

"He has heard something about the anonymous letter," Mr. Daynham observed, "and is coming to clear things up."

And Maisie was compelled to stifle her impatience until her lover's arrival.

Between the girl and her half-brother there had been little intercourse, and still less affection.

For several years preceding his death the girl had scarcely seen him, as Mr. Daynham rarely visited England; and Duke's reception at the villa in Italy was by no means of such a cordial nature as to warrant a frequent repetition of his visits.

She knew in a vague sort of way that Duke was bad form, and now and again a stray rumour reached her concerning some of his most outrageous extravagances.

Still, whatever might have been his failings, the man was her brother, and she waited with a certain amount of uneasiness for her lover's coming.

That he would be able to give a satisfactory explanation of this mysterious message she could not, she dared not doubt, for to doubt his ability in this matter would be to ruin all the hopes of her life.

But, still, in spite of her love and unbounded trust in Frank, she could not altogether banish the feeling of inquietude which this strange warning caused her, and it was with a sensation of extreme anxiety that she counted the hours which must necessarily elapse before the arrival of her lover.

Neither was she alone in her uneasiness. Mr. Daynham, despite his assumed indifference, was in reality equally anxious with his daughter to have the affair cleared up.

Duke and he had never been on good terms; and, indeed, the young man had subjected his step-father to endless worry and annoyance; but this was a serious implication, and it behoved him to sift it to the bottom.

Evening was fast verging upon night when Frank at length made his appearance. He had dined at the nearest railway-station, and had then proceeded to his destination in the sole vehicle which the place afforded.

Mr. Daynham had gone for a stroll by the side of the lake, as was his custom, but Maisie was in the drawing-room, and in the joy of re-union the young people forgot for a time the strange nature of the errand upon which Frank had come.

Even when the girl remembered, a single glance at her lover's frank features sufficed to dispel the foolish alarms which had clustered involuntarily round her heart.

How stupid she must have been ever to have been frightened by the wild words of an anonymous writer.

For herself she required no further proof; she looked at the brave, honest eyes, gazing steadily into hers and was satisfied.

Presently Frank said,—

"Maisie, where is your father?"

"Down by the lake; he will return soon, or

shall I send a servant to tell him you have come?"

"Yes!" he responded thoughtfully, "it will be better to see him at once. Remember I have not yet exculpated myself from this charge."

Maisie laughed merrily; she had no fears now; they had vanished as completely as the snows of the last year. How could she doubt with her lover's hand in hers, and his kisses yet warm on her rosy lips?

"Were you not alarmed?" he asked, when she had despatched a servant to summon her father, "at the receipt of such a curious missive?"

"Yes!" she admitted reluctantly. "I must confess it did frighten me just a tiny bit; but Frank, how came you to know anything about it?"

He stroked her hair caressingly.

"I may not tell you that," he said, "at least not now; it is another's secret. But you do not ask me if I can clear myself from its imputation."

She raised her face to his with a charming smile.

"No!" she answered simply; "there is no need. I do not think my faith in you ever really weakened; but if it did your presence has completely restored it. Looking into your face I know that you can have done nothing wrong."

"Nothing criminal," he murmured, "and yet I have been weak, foolishly weak. But I hear your father's steps. Good evening, Mr. Daynham, I have followed my telegram closely, as you perceive."

Maisie's father greeted the young man cordially.

"I see you have been making good use of your time in bribing one of your judges," he said, with a gay laugh.

"Now that is ungracious, papa," Maisie interposed, "seeing that we sent to you immediately, or," correcting herself, "almost immediately."

"Well! now that I have come, let us get this disagreeable business finished quickly, and then we can have a comfortable chat. By the way, Maisie, do we continue to sit without lights?"

The girl rang the bell for the servants, and presently when they were once more alone, Frank began his narrative.

"In the first place," he remarked, "you must understand that until within the last few days I had no idea Duke Favert was related in any way to yourselves; otherwise I should probably have acted differently. Years ago we were for a short period on rather intimate terms, but for various reasons, into which it is not needful to enter, the friendship did not prove a lasting one, and we finally parted after a bitter quarrel. From that moment I never saw him again until the night of his death."

Mr. Daynham looked up quickly as if about to speak, but he checked himself, and Frank continued.

"Of course you will remember all about the inquest and the verdict, which was an absolutely just one, as I can testify, having been the sole witness of Duke's death,"—and then he briefly described to his interested hearers what had actually occurred.

"You will naturally inquire," he said, "why I did not at once report the circumstances to the proper authorities. That was my first impulse, but the desire to avoid a public scandal, chiefly on my mother's account, prevented me."

"I do not wish to palliate my conduct; it was weak, lamentably weak, but I have given you the true reason. You know how delicate she is, how sensitive, and I am not without enemies who would willingly have seized upon the fact of my presence to drag my name in the mire. Now I have told you the true story of Duke's death. The very nature of the case precludes me from offering any corroboration; I have nothing to give but my bare word, but with my dying breath I could fearlessly assert that my hands are free from the blood of that unhappy man."

He finished speaking, and for a brief space there was silence, broken by Maisie, who placed both her hands in Frank's.

"For me," she said proudly, "your words re-

quire no confirmation. I am as fully convinced of your innocence as of my own."

Mr. Daynham held out his hand.

"It was a very awkward position, my boy," he said, "but I think you acted wrongly; it is always bad policy to conceal the truth, even with the best intentions. However, that is not the matter for discussion. With regard to the statement you have just made, my opinion coincides with Maisie's. I believe you implicitly."

There still remained one point, however, which caused Mr. Daynham some amount of disquiet, but he did not mention it until after his daughter had retired.

Then when the two men had adjourned to the smoking-room for a last cigar, he said,—

"By the way, my boy, there is one unsatisfactory circumstance connected with your narrative. Evidently we are not the sole possessors of this secret. Now, what is there to prevent Maisie's correspondent, let us say, from publishing her story to the world?"

"Mr. Daynham," the young man responded quietly, "you have trusted me so fully already, that I feel sure you will extend your confidence even a little farther. There is but one person in the world besides ourselves who has the faintest knowledge of my whereabouts on that particular evening, and that person is Maisie's informant. It is impossible for me, without betraying her confidence to enter into details; but I can answer for her future secrecy with my life. With regard to that matter we have absolutely nothing to fear."

"Then I am content, and now let us change the conversation."

CHAPTER IV.

FRANK MACKINDER will never forget the happiness of those first few days that followed his visit to Italy.

Now that Maisie and her father knew everything the young man began to realise more vividly how heavy must have been his burden had he not been compelled to entrust them with his secret.

Now and henceforward there would not be one single thought or action to be hidden from the beautiful girl who had promised to bear his name, and the knowledge made his heart light.

For nearly a week he had Maisie almost completely to himself, and it seemed to him as if he were living in fairy-land.

Together they walked or drove through the most charming and perfect scenery; or launching their little skiff on the blue waters of the sunlit lake dreamed the golden hours away, each happy in the other's presence.

"Maisie," said her lover one evening as they returned from the lake, "have you remembered that this is our last excursion for many months? To-morrow I return to London. Are you sorry, darling?"

The girl's eyes slowly filled with tears.

"Oh, Frank," she murmured, "I have been so happy, so perfectly happy, and now it is all at an end."

"Only for a time, my beloved," he whispered fondly, kissing a stray tear from her cheeks; "a few months, a few short months more, and then you will come with me for ever, never to be parted again in life. Maisie, shall you be ready when that time comes?"

She looked at him with a bright smile, and the gleam of happiness that shone in her violet eyes was more than sufficient answer to his question.

"We shall expect your mother over in the winter, Frank," Mr. Daynham said, while they were seated at dinner, "and is there not a cousin too? Well, the more the merrier; we shall have ample accommodation, and a hearty welcome for you all."

"You are very kind," Frank returned, and glancing fondly at Maisie, "You may be sure my best endeavours will be devoted to inducing my mother to accept your generous invitation."

"Tell them excuses will be of no avail, we are depending upon them. I have asked Mr. Hall

to come, so that we shall form a nice little party."

"Wyndham Hall!" asked Frank in surprise, "I was not aware you knew him; he never hinted at the acquaintanceship."

Mr. Daynham laughed.

"I met him casually," he exclaimed, "and was rather taken with him; he seemed a nice young fellow."

"He is," Frank responded with enthusiasm; "he is my greatest friend."

"Well, he has promised to join us on your return."

In the morning Mr. Daynham, accompanied by Maisie, drove Frank to the station, where they bade him farewell, and renewed their entreaties that when he rejoined them he would bring his mother and cousin.

A slight cold was keeping Mrs. Mackinder confined to her room on the morning when Frank arrived at home; but Stella was waiting eagerly to receive him.

She had received a telegram announcing the success of her cousin's mission; but she wished to hear the news from his own lips.

"Well! Stella," he exclaimed, gaily, "my prophecy was a correct one. I have laid bare all the facts of the case, with the result that my position is stronger and more assured than before. Now you can set your mind at ease. Not only is no harm done, but indirectly you have done me personally a vast amount of good. You have compelled me to disperse the only shadow that lay between Maisie and myself, and in all sincerity dear cos, I thank you. You cannot imagine what an immense relief it is to feel that now there is nothing in my life which I need try to hide from her knowledge."

"And you will forgive my mad act, Frank?" the girl said, softly.

He laughed a clear joyous laugh.

"What nonsense, cos!" he exclaimed; "there is no need to speak about forgiveness. What you did was the best thing which could have happened; it has been the means of making me really free."

"Frank," she said, shyly, after a slight pause, "do they guess who was the writer of that note?"

"No," he answered, warmly, "and they never will. The subject is finished with, never to be revived."

Mrs. Mackinder asked no questions concerning her son's sudden journey to the Continent; she was content to draw her conclusions from the sight of his happy face.

Rather to Frank's surprise his cousin offered no opposition to the acceptance of Mr. Daynham's cordial invitation.

Instead of making some excuse to stay behind, as he fully expected, she appeared to look forward with an unusual degree of interest to the visit, a phase of demeanour for which he was puzzled to account.

That it had nothing to do with Wyndham he felt certain, since both the young men had thought fit to preserve silence on the subject of the former's invitation, and none of his many guesses came anywhere near the truth.

As a matter of fact, Stella could find no peace until she had confessed everything to Maisie, which she proceeded to do on the very first opportunity.

It was the evening before Wyndham's expected arrival, and the two girls were alone together in the room which Maisie had made her own.

"Miss Daynham," Stella said, "this afternoon you remarked how odd it seemed that I should address you by your formal title when the others all called you Maisie. If you will listen for a few moments I will tell you the reason. When I have finished it will be for you to determine whether you still wish me to call you by the more endearing name."

Her voice trembled and the black eyes drooped; but the girl proceeded bravely with her story.

"Now," she exclaimed in conclusion, "you know all, you need not feel jealous of me. The old mad wicked spirit has died out. My eyes are opened now to the truth, and I know that the passion which animated me was not love, but a mistaken sense of outraged pride."

Maisie kissed her affectionately for answer.

"Stella," she whispered, gently, "for the future, remember I am going to reckon you as my dearest friend. And now not another word as to the past; let it rest. For me already the future is bright and joyous; some day it will be so for you also," and strange to say Stella made no effort to combat the assertion.

On the next day the party was joined by Wyndham Hall, and Maisie watching her new friend's face read there that which confirmed the conclusions she had already drawn.

The next three weeks passed swiftly away, and Mrs. Mackinder reluctantly gave the signal for departure.

"We are not afraid of outstaying our welcome," she said brightly to Mr. Daynham; "indeed it will not be easy to forget your kindness, but domestic arrangements compel my return to town."

After dinner the young people strolled out for the last time into the charming grounds.

At first they kept in a little group, but presently Wyndham loitered behind with Stella for sole company.

The young man's face bore evident traces of excitement, and Stella, whose arm lay lightly upon his, felt that his limbs trembled.

Since that unlucky day down at Whitmore he had breathed no word of his love, though his actions plainly showed that his fire burned as fiercely as ever.

Now he was once more about to test his fate, and this time he fondly hoped with better chance of success.

"Stella," he said, abruptly, "once I asked you to be my wife, and you refused. I alone was to blame. I was too precipitate—too eager. Then you knew but little of me. Stella, all that is changed. We are no longer partial strangers. You know now that my love is not a form of words, but a living, breathing truth. Stella, my darling, do not send me away again in despair. For long weary months I have looked forward to this moment. Stella, have you a word of hope for me? One little word from you will fill me with happiness as deep and abiding as your cousin's, will you whisper it, my darling? You cannot doubt the sincerity of my affection; you know that my love is true, and will never lessen while life lasts. Stella, what is your answer?"

He took one of her hands, and she did not struggle against its imprisonment, but let it lie unresistingly in his, while a wave of burning red suffused her cheeks.

"I do not doubt your love," she said, softly, "but—but I am not worthy of you. I am—"

How Stella intended to finish the sentence will never be known, for in an instant her lover's arms were round her, and the full red lips were covered with his passionate kisses.

"My darling," he cried, "you love me; I ask no more; my heart is filled with happiness."

"If you people are coming back to the house it is high time to be moving," came in Maisie's clear rich tones, and Stella slipped away to her friend, while Wyndham related his wondrous news to Frank.

On the way to her room that night Mrs. Mackinder went into the girl's chamber.

"Stella," she said, kissing her niece affectionately, "this news has made me very happy," and the girl, looking into the kind motherly eyes, understood perfectly what was left unspoken.

It was a glorious day in summer and the church of St. John was packed with a dense throng of sight-seers, who had assembled to witness the ceremony of a double marriage, and a low murmur of admiration ran through the assembly at the appearance of the brides.

Both were equally beautiful, though in widely differing styles, and both, to judge from their faces, equally happy; nor in the years that have since passed has either found reason to regret her choice.

[THE END.]

In the announcements of marriages in Spain the ages of the contracting parties are always given.

FACILE.

"HAVE you something to 'elp a pore man on his way, mum?" asked Hungry Henry. "Certainly," said the woman, as she whistled for the dog.

OUR evening dailies come out in five editions. The first mentions a rumour, the second confirms it, the third gives details, the fourth enlarges upon these, the fifth denies it.

JACK: "It is going to take Ada a long time to learn to play the banjo." Helen: "Hasn't she any talent?" Jack: "Oh, she has talent enough; but I'm teaching her."

MR. STAYLATE: "Dear me! I don't believe this clock is going, is it?" She (wearily): "No. We always wind it before going to bed. It ran down an hour ago."

LEGAL EXAMINER: "Can you give me an instance of a person inciting another to perjury?" Candidate: "Yes; when the Court asks a female witness how old she is."

"POP," said Tommy, "what's the difference between a bon mot and a joke?" "A bon mot, Tommy, is something you tell a friend, and a joke is something a friend tells you."

MRS. LE ROUNDER (angrily): "You have no excuse for staying out so late." Mr. Le Rounder: "Haven't I! Whatchu a'pose I've been standing at the corner thinkin' 'bout for the last half-hour?"

THE VICAR: "I suppose you wouldn't be defending that defaulting cashier if you thought he really took the money?" The Solicitor: "I shouldn't be defending him if I didn't think he took enough to pay my bill."

A LITTLE girl who had been taken to church cast her eyes, for the first time, on a group of choir boys in surplices, and very much disturbed the equanimity of her mother by inquiring:—"Are they all going to get their hair cut?"

"How do you like your new teacher, Willie?" "I'm afraid of her, mamma. She's so awfully swell." "Does she dress very stylishly?" "Does she! Mamma, she could put you in either one of the sleeves!"

"I ENJOYED your lecture on the bimetallic question very much," said the quiet man to the orator; "but I should like to ask you one question." "Certainly," said the orator; "go ahead." "What side of the question are you on?"

MRS. DE PAINTER: "This stuff won't do at all, and you will have to take it back. It doesn't harmonise with my complexion." Shopman (convincingly): "But, madam, it harmonised with the complexion you had when you selected it."

DR. PILLEM: "Did you administer the opiate at nine o'clock, as I directed?" Mrs. Gamp (with a sniff): "That I did, sir; but it seemed a pity to have to wake the poor man out of the first sound sleep he's had for four days to give it to him!"

"LUCY, I am shocked!" said Miss Elderly to her younger sister. "What about, Ethel?" "I am shocked that you should have allowed Mr. Brandon to kiss you in the conservatory." "But where could we find a more retired spot?"

PATIENT (after wound has healed): "Yes, I am all right again, but I fear that I shall carry this terrible scar as long as I live." Surgeon (reassuringly): "Yes; but then, you know, you may live only a year or two."

SAID the young housewife: "Have you any nice chickens?" "Yes, ma'am," replied the market man. "Then," said his customer, "you may send me a couple in time for dinner, and I want them with the croquettes left in; do you understand?"

MRS. BORDROOM: "That boarder with the musical taste is a nuisance. We used to make him wake up in the morning by dropping coal-scuttles downstairs." Star Boarder: "And now?" "And now he's taken to attending Wagner opera, and we can't wake him up at all."

HE: "You told me your father was a retired capitalist, and now I find, after marrying you, that he is not worth a penny." She: "I only told you the truth. He was a capitalist once, but after the Australian collapse a few years ago he retired from the capitalist business completely."

OLD GENT: "What are you crying about my little man?" Little Man: "Jimmie O'Brien licked me first, and then fether kicked me for letting Jimmie lick me, and then Jimmie licked me again for telling father, an' now I suppose I shall catch it again from father."

"Do you know," said Nell, "I was all alone in the conservatory for ten minutes with that fascinating Charlie Fuller last evening, and I was so afraid." "So afraid of what?" asked Belle. "Afraid he was going to propose to you!" "No; afraid he wasn't."

"How inattentive you are, John!" said the would-be considerate hostess to the son of the house. "You really must look after Mr. Brown. He's helping himself to everything." Brown, who, if somewhat shy, is conscious of a very healthy appetite, looks rather discomfited.

MR. NEWRED (wearily): "My dear, here's twenty dollars which I have saved by giving up smoking. I wish you would take it and get some experienced housekeeper to teach you how to cook." Mrs. Newred (delightedly): "How good of you, my darling. I'll send for mother."

"WHAT do you suppose a fellow's chances are for getting a good wife?" asked Reggy. "I should say they were about equal to the chances of his being a good husband," replied Tom. "By Jove! then I guess I won't marry!" cried Reggy.

A WASHERWOMAN applied for help to a gentleman, who gave her a note to the manager of a certain club. It read as follows: "Dear Mr. X: This woman wants washing." Very shortly the answer came back: "Dear Sir: I dare say she does, but I don't fancy the job."

MR. D'AVNOO (hotly): "I should think you'd know better than to leave your seal coat in such an exposed place. The first thief that comes along would see it." Mrs. D'AVNOO (calmly): "No self-respecting thief would be seen with a seal coat so out of style as that old thing is."

As the train drew up at a country station on the South Eastern Railway, a pleasant-looking gentleman stepped out on the platform, and inhaling the fresh air enthusiastically, observed to the guard, "Isn't this invigorating?" "No, sir; it's Caterham," replied the guard.

"Do you want to know how to tell which is your left foot, so that you won't make any more mistakes?" asked the corporal of a member of the awkward squad which he was drilling. "Yes," was the reply; "I should like to know very much." "Well, don't move your right foot. The other one is your left foot."

A TEACHER in a Board school was endeavouring to explain the meaning of the word "harness" to a group of young urchins. "Now, Jenkins, what does your father put on a horse?" inquired the teacher. "Well, sir, if it is a good racer he generally puts all he's got on it," replied the youthful scholar.

CLARA: "What's the matter, dear?" Dora: "It's too much to bear. Mr. Faintheart hasn't proposed yet." Clara: "But you told me you wouldn't marry him." Dora: "Of course I wouldn't. But, after all the time I've wasted on him, I think he might at least give me a chance to refuse him."

"I WAS in the theatre when your play was brought out for the first time." "You were there, were you?" "Yes; and I saw you there, too. Everybody was yawning, and to my astonishment you yawned, too, with the rest." "I had to yawn. If I hadn't somebody would have suspected me of being the author."

HOBBS: "I tell you I'd like to have a wife who could discuss questions of the day with me. Now, I suppose when you get home your wife never talks over the money question with you, does she?" Poorpurses: "Doesn't talk over the money question! You ought just to hear her when she wants a new hat."

TO HER FIANCE: "I was telling papa to-day of your narrow escape when your dog-cart turned over, and he said that Providence took care of drunken men and fools, which was very unkind of him. But I assured him you were perfectly sober. Then he said he believed you were; and wasn't that nice of him?"

TWO Irishmen entered one day into earnest discussion on the comparative usefulness of the sun and moon. "Shure the sun gives a stronger light," said one. "But the moon is more sensible," replied the other. "How do you make that out?" "Oh, it's aisy." "Let's hear you prove it." "Bedad, the moon shines at night when we need it, while the sun comes out in broad daylight, when a one-eyed man can see without it."

HIS had his photograph taken one day when he was at the beach with the boys. It was not a good picture, for he was not exactly in condition for taking a good one. But he thought he would have a joke with his wife about it, so when he reached home he handed it to her saying: "There is a picture of a man who loves you." She looked at it and a deep blush overspread her face as she said: "It is like Jim. Where did you see him?" Now he would give a good deal to know who Jim is.

IT WAS little Tommy Smith's fifth birthday, and while out for a walk with his mother he met his Uncle Jack. Expecting a gift, he greeted his uncle with: "Uncle Jack, I am five years old to-day." To which his uncle replied: "Are you really? Well, I wish you many happy returns of the day, Tommy." Tommy being silent, his mother said: "Say 'Thank you, Uncle Jack.'" But Tommy, in disgust at not getting his expected tip, replied: "What have I got to say 'fank you' for, when he hasn't given me anything?"

SOON after a certain lord was made Governor of Canada he was overwhelmed with begging letters, the incentive being the remarkable statements sent out concerning his vast wealth and his unbounded generosity. Among the letters he received was one which constituted a standing joke among his friends, who never cease to rally him about it. It was from a woman who wanted a sewing machine, and her letter commenced like this: "Dear Sir,—A year ago you came to our town to make a speech, I went out to hear you, and I have been ill ever since." The fact was the lady caught cold on the occasion, but she did not refer to the matter in diplomatic language.

SOME time ago a well-known barrister had under cross-examination a youth from the country who rejoiced in the name of Sampson, and whose replies were provocative of much laughter in the court. "And so," questioned the barrister, "you wish the court to believe that you are a peacefully disposed and inoffensive kind of person?" "Yes." "And that you have no desire to follow in the footsteps of your namesake and smite the Philistines?" "No, I've not," answered the witness. "And if I had the desire I ain't got the power at present." "Then you think you would be unable to cope successfully with a thousand enemies, and utterly rout them with the jawbone of an ass?" "Well," answered the ruffled Sampson, "I might have a try when you have done with the weapon!"

A SHORT time ago a clergyman was giving the children a scripture lesson, in anticipation of the annual visit of the Government Inspector. He had been explaining "The Inspiration," telling them that it was an unknown influence which put thoughts into one's mind, and so enabled one to speak what were really the words of another. Unfortunately, his reverence was suffering from a severe cold, and could scarcely be heard, so, for the convenience of the children, the schoolmaster repeated every word he said. Wishing to test if they understood, he asked: "Now, can anyone give me an illustration of inspiration?" Little Boy: "Yes, sir; please, sir—you and master, sir." Parson: "Well—ahem—not exactly—not such a bad idea, though. But can't you tell me some incident in the Bible that our lesson reminds you of?" Little Girl (after a rather long pause): "Please, sir—when Balaam couldn't speak, the ass spoke."

SOCIETY.

THERE has always been a close friendship between the younger members of the Orléans family and the sons and daughters of the Prince of Wales.

THE Queen has approved of the appointment of Lady Mary Lygon to be lady-in-waiting to the Duchess of York, in the place of Lady Eva Greville. Lady Mary is a sister of Lord Beauchamp and Lady Amphil, and a niece of Lord Stanhope.

THE little children of the Crown Princess of Roumania have been much admired by all who have seen them. Prince Carol is a lovely little boy, and the baby Princess Elisabeth a cherub-faced, golden haired mite, who should some day be a great beauty.

THE Duke of Fife has several small shooting-lodges on the Mar estate. As, however, none of them could possibly accommodate the party usually entertained by Princess Louise of Wales and the Duke in the autumn, it is probable that his Grace will rent Invercauld from Mr. Farquharson for the Scotch season.

THE Duke and Duchess of York received at York House a deputation from the Victoria Hospital for Children, who presented to their Royal Highnesses a cot endowed in perpetuity in commemoration of the birth of Prince Edward of York.

NASRULLAH KHAN is very undemonstrative, and does not put himself much out of the way to make frequent return salutations, but when he does so his method is a not ungraceful touch of his chest and a turn of the hand toward the person he salutes, that is all. He uses several pocket handkerchiefs, each one of a different colour, and meant, when shown, to summon a particular member of his suite.

THE new Duchess of Aosta leaves a country which boasts of so many Princesses that she must have felt almost lost in a crowd when mingling with them in Society; and she goes to a land where Royal ladies are remarkably scarce and proportionately valuable. She will be second lady in Italy, till a Princess of Naples appears on the scene; and in many pageants and festivities she will be the leading attraction, as the Duke of Aosta is told off for duty in Northern Italy, while the King and Queen stay South.

THE Duke and Duchess of Fife are to arrive at Old Mar Lodge about August 15th, and will stay there until the end of October. Old Mar Lodge, which was built about a hundred years ago, was formerly the Mar Forest residence of the Duffs, but it was abandoned after the enlargement of Corriemulzie (New Mar) Lodge, and for several autumns past it has been lent to Madame Albani and Mr. Gye. The house, which is quite plain, stands at the base of Creag a Bhuilg, on the north side of the Dee, about four miles above Braemar, and near the private bridge. The interior is being partly redecorated and refurnished, and as the accommodation which it affords is quite inadequate for the Duke and Duchess, with their guests and household, a number of iron or timber structures will be put up close to the lodge, to serve as additional bedrooms and sitting-rooms. New Mar Lodge is to be rebuilt on the same site on a much larger scale.

COUNTRESS VON ERBACH, who has been staying at Balmoral and Windsor for some time, is the only daughter of the late Prince Alexander of Hesse, by hismorganatic marriage with Mdlle. Hauck, who was created Princess of Battenberg by the Emperor of Austria. The Countess Marie is the eldest member of the Battenberg family, having been born in July, 1852, and she was married in April, 1871, to the Count von Erbach-Schöberg, who is the head of a very ancient and influential family, and the owner of large estates in Hesse and Baden. Count and Countess von Erbach live usually at Schloss Schöberg, a beautiful place on the Bergstrasse, where they have several times been visited by the Queen when Her Majesty has been staying at Darmstadt.

STATISTICS.

ONE-SEVENTH of the territory of France is composed of forests.

ONE-FIFTH of the whole of the African continent is a desert.

ONE-SIXTH of the Postal Department business in London is conducted by women.

CUBA has twelve varieties of musquitoes and three hundred varieties of butterflies.

JAPAN has only about two thousand miles of railway to accommodate the traffic of forty million persons. England, with a population of about thirty-eight million, has twenty-one thousand miles of railway, while the railway mileage of the United States, to accommodate seventy million persons, is something like 228,852 miles, including sidings and spurs.

GEMS.

GOOD manners is the art of making those people easy with whom we converse.

THE gloomy and resentful are usually found among those who have nothing to do or who do nothing.

If the cat had wings no birds would be left in the air. If everyone had what he wished for who would have anything?

THERE is something to protect the good man from the aspersions which are sure to be cast at him. The picture may have spots and stains which mar its beauty, even as unjust insinuations may blemish the reputation, but they are all on the glass and not on the picture itself. The man's character is untouched and unharmed.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

WHITE PERFECTION CAKE.—One cup of butter rubbed with three cups of sugar to a cream, one cup of sweet milk, one cup of corn starch dissolved in the milk, three cups of flour, two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, whites of twelve eggs. Ice with whites of two eggs, juice and grated rind of three oranges, thickened with confectioner's sugar.

SWEET-MILK SCONES.—One pound flour, half-teaspoonful salt, one and a half teaspoonful baking powder, two teaspoonfuls sugar, one small tablespoonful butter or dripping; quarter pound currants may be added, if desired; rub the butter in among all the other things, and then wet it with about one breakfastcupful of sweet milk; roll the scones out pretty thin and cut them neatly, and put them on the griddle till a pale yellow.

SALT FISH CROQUETTES.—For eight good-sized croquettes take two cupfuls of cold mashed potatoes, add to them two tablespoonfuls of milk, and stir over the fire, mashing and working until the potatoes are hot and smooth. Now take a portion of this in the hand and flatten it out. In the centre put about a tablespoonful of shredded codfish, roll the potato over it and make it perfectly smooth. Dip in beaten egg and then in bread-crumbs and fry in smoking hot fat.

BREAD PUDDING.—Soak one pint of fine crumbs in a pint of milk until soft, add three tablespoonfuls of cocoa dissolved in a little water, three well beaten eggs, a half cup of granulated sugar, and another pint of milk. Set the pudding-dish in a pan of hot water, and bake one hour. Whipped cream flavoured with vanilla is very good with this pudding, or a sauce made from a scant cup of sugar, a tablespoonful of corn-starch, and a cup of water may be used. Cook the ingredients in a double-boiler ten minutes, and just before serving add an ounce of butter and a half teaspoonful of vanilla.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Shahzade has not adopted English evening dress, although he has quite a passion for frock-coats.

A NEW railroad, uniting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, is nearly completed. It crosses the Andes, and brings Buenos Ayres within forty hours' travel of Valparaiso.

THE Turks believe amber to be an infallible guard against the injurious effects of nicotine; hence its extensive use for the mouth-pieces of pipes.

JAPAN has a banking-house that has been in business without a break for over 300 years. The bank has now over 80 branches, and is the largest private bank in Japan.

THE Chenab Irrigation Canal in Northern India is said to be the widest canal in the world. It is 110 feet broad, and will be 200 feet broad when completed, with a length of 450 miles.

A SPECTATOR in a Japanese theatre, on payment of a small extra fee, is permitted to stand up, and the person behind him cannot object, although the latter's view of the performance is obstructed.

ARTIFICIAL eyes were first made in Egypt. They were of gold and silver; and cheaper ones were of ivory and copper. Hundreds of years later, in the sixteenth century, they were made, in Europe, of porcelain.

RECENT investigations have brought to light the fact that the gorilla is equipped with a sort of air bag in the chest over the lungs, and connected with the trachea or wind-pipe. By striking this organ the animal is enabled to emit his terrific shrieks and roars.

A HONEY-BEE, instead of a carrier-pigeon, for carrying a letter, is a new idea. An English bee-keeper has been training bees for this purpose. The insect is taken away from the hive, a letter printed by microphotography is gummed to his little back, and he is thrown in the air.

A NEW use has been found for old boots and shoes. This is how they are treated in the process of conversion into a novel kind of house carpet: The shoes are thrown promiscuously into a large tank into which steam and dissolving compounds are run, thereby causing old shoes to take thick liquid form. Certain proportions of tallow, borax and glue are then introduced, and the pulp is then run into moulds. The moulds are shaped after the plan of a regular sand mould, and may have the form of flowers, leaves, figures or geometrical designs. The pulp is run into these moulds, and the figure hardens in the cold air. These casts are arranged in the proper figure or design, when a cementing process begins. The cement is a compound made from the leather pulp and glue, and is run between the figures. The figures soften a little with the compound, and the whole hardens together. In the casting of each figure a different coloured pulp is used—red pulp for red roses, white pulp for white flowers, green for leaves, and so on. Thus elaborate designs may be carried out. Then comes the pressing by the use of rollers, and polishing with varnish. The result is a nice-looking floor covering, the cost of which is less than straw matting, and less than oil-cloth; in fact, an economical and durable carpet covering.

AN Indian boy begins to handle a light bow when he toddles—that means at the age of four or five years. His bow is taller than himself. He has a habit of practicing at anything round his wigwam. By the time he attains the age of twelve he is permitted to use sharp arrows. Such a boy must be strong at eighteen to use a man's bow. A white man, when he takes an Indian bow for the first time, has all he can do to bend it. It takes a strong man to do it, but there is also a large amount of knack required. A member of the Ogala Sioux tribe, whose name implies "The Long Man"—he stands nearly seven feet high—has been known to kill an antelope at one hundred and twenty-five measured yards. Remarkable shooting is often performed by the Sioux, though nothing that will compare with the somewhat legendary performances of Robin Hood.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BABEL.—It cannot be done.

S. S. G.—No, nor in the United Kingdom.

CONSTANT READER.—Submit the deed to a solicitor.

R. G.—You had better consult someone in the trade.

QUESTIONS.—We have no official figures upon the subject.

CHURCHMAN.—The doctor employed does his own dispensing.

OLD READER.—It becomes overheated. Lay it by for a time.

ENTR.—It is said to be of some efficacy for the removal of freckles.

GERALD.—We presume it can be obtained at any book-store.

THROUDED.—What you require is medical advice, and that we do not give.

A. H.—Chiltern Hundreds is a district in Buckinghamshire.

RENEWED.—Ask some dealer to name a price. We do not undertake valuations.

J. B.—Correction judiciously applied has its effect even upon little dogs.

FRIDA.—We should think sponging with bouillon would best meet the case.

INTERVIEW.—Asiatic cholera is the most rapidly fatal disease known to medical science.

ROM.—Since the Zulu war of 1880 British standards have not been taken into the field.

B. C.—The rules of the society constitute the law binding on the case, and we have not seen them.

IMPUDENT.—The children of the second "marriage" are of course illegitimate.

MELBA.—Wear old loose kid gloves while ironing; they will save many callous spots on the hands.

W. M.—Study how to grow plants and take care of them before you try to make money out of them.

A. LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—If the man feels so disposed, the first thing for him to do would be to make a complaint to the local Justice of the Peace.

DOCTOR.—Sea bathing, it is said, causes many diseases of the ear. Cotton should be put in the ear when it is the intention to submerge the head.

TRAGEDY.—There is no cure for what are called birth marks, if an operation has not been made for the purpose while the child was still in infancy.

K. R.—Use the best Indian ink, and grind it out from the stick in a thin mullage of gum arabic. If you use thick gum the letters are liable to crack.

AMATEUR.—You should call in a local expert. In the condition you describe it might be dangerous for those unaccustomed to such work to meddle with it.

LEGALITY.—You had better see your step-mother and come to some arrangement with regard to the furniture, of which you are entitled to a third portion.

S. H.—Pour boiling water over it, stir it up well, and the dirty sediment will fall to the bottom. When cold, remove the cake on the top of the water.

EMILIA.—First shake and brush thoroughly; then sprinkle with pepper; finally, when folded and put by, place a small lump of camphor between the folds.

ORCHIDS.—The bride's cake of to-day is a relic of a Roman custom. At a Roman marriage the bride was expected to prepare a part, at least, of the wedding feast with her own hands.

WORMS.—The best way to get rid of warts is to shave the top of them neatly with a razor, and then apply daily a little acetic acid to discolored part; the wart should gradually break up and disappear.

SCOTCH.—Sponge it first with clear cold water; if that fails put a little ammonia in the water, not much, and sponge then with clean water again; if the parast is red, the ammonia will do no harm.

LAURENCE.—If a shirt bosom or any other article has been scorched in ironing lay it where the bright sunshine will shine directly upon it, and the chances are for a complete disappearance of the stain.

DWYER.—Keeping the entire surface of the body clean is one of the best remedies for all face troubles. Attention to diet and plenty of outdoor exercise with local applications are the best treatment.

IVY.—Wetting the hair in the morning and brushing it well afterwards should have the effect of invigorating it, so that chains the scalp of the disease that tends to rot the roots of the hair.

MORA.—Possibly you boil it either for too short or too long a time. When boiling test the sugar now and again by taking out a little on a stick, plunging it into cold water, and as soon as it will break clean between the teeth without unpleasantly sticking to them pour it out at once.

ORRY.—The Euphrates is the largest river of Western Asia. It is often named the Great River. In regard to the Tigris, it is certain that it and the Euphrates at one time flowed into the sea by distinct channels. Their junction is supposed to have taken place more than two thousand years ago.

JIM.—No member of the Scotch peerage, no matter what his rank, can sit in the House of Commons, but a Scotch peer's eldest son, who is a peer by courtesy only, may offer himself for election to the House.

SOPHIE.—A girl of fourteen should be devoted to her school duties. Let society alone for three or four years, and when you enter it you will be so well equipped mentally as to be able to take in it a leading part.

HOUSEWIFE.—The best polish for furniture is methylated spirits, sweet oil and vinegar, say one gill or half pint of each, rubbed on with a rag free from lint; then rub well with a clean duster, and it will look equal to new.

ANXIOUS.—As the young man's circumstances of employment are peculiar we think he had better consult a doctor in order that he may make sure there is not poisoning of the system going on which may call for severe remedy.

LANCE.—We imagine your stone is in reality a bit of water-worn flint; still it is possible that you have discovered a valuable pebble, and in order to ascertain the worth of the thing you might submit it to a dealer in precious stones.

BIRD FANCY.—Fruit, seeds, grain, dry biscuits, bread moistened with water. Teach your bird to talk by constantly talking to it and repeating the same word or sentence several times. It certainly is old enough to learn.

WANDERER.—We advise you not to go out on the chance of securing a berth when you arrive at your destination. Write first to the Emigration Bureau, Broadway, Westminster, and pamphlets containing all information will be forwarded to you.

SMOKE.

WHENEVER things with me go wrong,
And life seems dull and prosy,
And not a line of any song
Can make the day more rosy,
I turn me to the ancient jar
That stands upon my table,
And choose a fragrant, mild cigar
And smoke, and dream of—Mabel.

Around my head the white clouds rise,
Wherein, by necromancy,
I catch the light of two blue eyes
To cheer my vagrant fancy;
All thoughts of care that came to fret
Are suddenly a fable;
The only thing I don't forget
Are my cigar and—Mabel.

Tobacco, many times I've heard
A slander hurled to hurt you;
Let it be mine to wing a word
To praise your matchless virtue.
Others their curses at you fling—
I care not, since you're able,
When I am blue and sad, to bring
Me blissful dreams and—Mabel.

F. C.

A. C.—Take a strip of stout brown paper, cut button holes in it to fit the buttons on the coat, fit it on them, then take an old tooth-brush, dip it in whiting or plaster-powder (got in small boxes), and brush the buttons till they shine, shake coat, take off paper, and brush finally.

TOM BOWLING.—"Grog," the sea term for rum-and-water, is supposed to have derived its name from Admiral Edward Vernon, who wore grogram breeches, and hence was called "Old Grog." About the year 1745 he ordered his sailors to dilute their rum with water.

F. A.—Hotel keeper can entertain his friends freely without notifying any one, but if he continues the entertainment beyond the regular hour for closing of bar he may incur the danger of a prosecution for breach of certificate if any of those invited leave his house that night.

HARRY.—A steward on board a large ship attends to the food and refreshment department. He has charge of the wines, liquors, plate, linen, keeps accounts, makes out bills, &c.—In fact, is something like the butler in a gentleman's family. The cooks and other servants are subordinate to him.

SADIE.—In almost all cases the hair changes with the growth. It is a constitutional condition, and any attempt to change the course of nature is likely either to be a failure or to injure the quality of the hair. If it is fine and silky it probably could not be kept the same colour without making it coarse and less beautiful.

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—We do not think it is possible for you to get the situation you aim at except through the influence of some gentleman recommending you to a friend of his in the country; in all rural districts there are some of estate officials or poorer relatives who are always available for jobs such as you desire to obtain.

AN INTERESTED ONE.—China took its name from Tsin, an emperor who founded a dynasty three hundred years before the Christian era. He was the monarch who built the Great Wall and accomplished many other works of utility to the empire. It is also called the "Celestial Empire," because most of its early rulers claimed to be of heavenly descent.

LINDA.—A delicious savory for the luncheon or tea is made by cutting some hard-boiled eggs in two, lengthwise; the yolk is then removed and pounded up with some grated cheese—allow half an ounce for each egg—a little whipped cream or butter, a small quantity of tomato sauce, the seasoning being cayenne pepper and celery salt. The halves of the eggs are then lined with small watercress leaves and filled with the mixture. This dish should be accompanied by toast and butter.

Y. A.—You should first wash it over thoroughly and carefully with hot soda and water, using a brush to get well into crevices and corners. Then wash off all trace of soda with clean water, rub it over with a clean cloth, and leave it till next day to get thoroughly dry. If there are any cracks or chips on it these would need to be gone over lightly with the finest glass paper to make all even and smooth. Dust off, and then apply the enamel paint very thinly and allow that to dry till next day, when apply another very thin coat.

MARJORIE.—As he is in the wrong it is his duty to initiate the desired correspondence upon the subject, and make the best explanation he can respecting his continued absence. However impatient you may be to have him resume his visits to you, a just regard for your own dignity should counsel you to let him take the first step toward reconciliation. If he is worthy of your regard he will not long hesitate to tender you an apology for the slight he has put upon you, and manifest some disposition to resume the relations which so long existed between you.

BAWFUL HAL.—The bashfulness of which you complain can be partly overcome by mingling in general society, and endeavouring to be at ease in whatever situation you may be placed; also by getting rid of the self-consciousness which is in some persons the real cause of their trouble. Sometimes nervousness has something to do with it; but the cause what it may, it can be made, less apparent, as we have said, by seeking agreeable company, and taking part in the conversations suggested by the occurrences of the day; also by participating in the amusements of the evening, and keeping self entirely out of mind.

IN NEED OF ADVICE.—To accept invitations to elaborate entertainments and not to be able to fully reciprocate the hospitality extended to you is to lessen yourself in everybody's estimation. Live within your means, at the very start of your married life. By-and-by, perhaps, fortune will be more liberal with her smiles, and help you to take a more prominent position in the sphere in which you move. Better bear with your moderate circumstances for a while, and keep out of debt, than to launch forth into social entertainments and run the risk of being unable to overcome the reverse brought about by your folly.

PURPLED.—The custom of celebrating gold and silver weddings belongs to Germany. The silver wedding occurred only on the twenty-fifth anniversary, and most people could celebrate that; but to be fifty years married was a sort of an event in a family. The house was quite covered with garlands, all the neighbours from far and near were assembled, the ancient pair, dressed in their wedding dresses, walked in procession, with music, to the church, and the priest married them over again, and preached a pathetic sermon. There was a dinner, too, and dancing and singing; and in the evening there was no end to their noise and shouting when they drove off together for the second time as bride and bridegroom.

FLORENCE.—They should be put into warm soapuds and allowed to remain over night, then the water may be drained off and fresh hot soda added, then they may be at once put into a boiler, to stay there about half-an-hour, being gently pushed down into the suds as they rise with the boiling. Then turn them into the tub and gently move them about with the hands while cold water is poured over them. Rinse them very thoroughly, and if there are any discolourations squeeze them gently with the hands, and, if needed be, rub a little fine soap on them, patting the soiled places lightly. But now, under any circumstances, rub them down. Drain off this water and put them into the bluing, afterward into the starch. They must not be wrung, but pressed before starching until no water will drip from them. Let them remain in the starch water for some minutes, meanwhile turning and squeezing them until they are thoroughly saturated. The starch may be pressed out with the hands, or they may be put into a towel, the four corners drawn up and the towel twisted around to further remove the moisture.

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London: Published for the Proprietors, at 234, Strand, by G. F. CORNFORD; and printed by WOODWARD and KIMBER, 75 to 78 Long Acre, W.C.